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FUTURE
ISSUE 367

THE HU
Take America

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10 years gone

HALESTORM
On Dio, coming out,
and singing to trees

HELLRAISER
How Pinhead and co
shocked a generation

LAMB OF GOD

AGAIN THEY RISE.

+

**SONJA
AMY LEE
IN FLAMES
LORNA SHORE
MURDERDOLLS
TAYLOR HAWKINS
DEVIN TOWNSEND
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Editorial

Editor **Eleanor Goodman**
eleanor.goodman@futurenet.com
 Production Editor **Vanessa Thorpe**
vanessa.thorpe@futurenet.com
 Reviews Editor **Jonathan Selzer**
jonathan.selzer@futurenet.com
 Art Editor **Louise Brock**
louise.brock@futurenet.com
 Associate Editor **Dave Everley**
dave.everley@futurenet.com
 Staff Writer **Rich Hobson**
rich.hobson@futurenet.com
 Content Director - Music **Scott Rowley**

Contributors

Steve Appleford, Oliver Badin, Adam Brennan, Richard Chamberlain, Chris Chantler, Alec Chillingworth, Emma Cownley, Joe Daly, Hywel Davies, Remfry Dedman, Alex Deller, Jerry Ewing, Spencer Grady, Stephen Hill, Emma Johnston, Tyler Damarra Kelly, Hannah May Kilroy, Dom Lawson, Elliot Leaver, Danni Leivers, Dave Ling, Clay Marshall, Will Marshall, Sophie Maughan, Edwin McFee, Joel McIver, Matt Mills, Mór, Tom O'Boyle, Alastair Riddell, Liz Scarlett, Rosie Esther Solomon, Kevin Stewart-Panko, Paul Travers James Weaver, Christina Wenig, Kez Whelan, Jon Wiederhorn, Holly Wright, Nik Young

Cover Photography: Travis Shinn Image Manipulation: Phil Dunk

Photography

Justin Borucki, Derek Bremner, Steve Bright, Janson Bulpin, Stephanie Cabral, Duncan Everson, Nick Fancher, Andy Ford, Mick Hutson, Will Ireland, Simon Kallas, George Chin, Tina Korhonen, Marie Körner, Dave LePage, John McMurtrie, Kevin Nixon, Katja Ogrin, Jake Owens, Emma Painter, Tom Russell, Jeremy Saffer, Anthony Scanga, Ester Segarra, James Sharrock, Travis Shinn, Frank White, Jonathan Weiner, Dani Willgress, Neil Zlozower

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Advertising

Media packs are available on request
 Advertising Sales Director **Lara Jaggon** - lara.jaggon@futurenet.com
 Account Director **Steven Pyatt** - steven.pyatt@futurenet.com
 Account Director **Ayomide Magbagbeola** - ayomide.magbagbeola@futurenet.com
 Sales Executive **Saskia Pemberton** - saskia.pemberton@futurenet.com
 Sales Executive **Ethan Lloyd** - ethan.lloyd@futurenet.com

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Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw** - licensing@futurenet.com

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Production

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 Head of Production **Tom Reynolds**
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 Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
 Production Manager **Keely Miller**

Management

Managing Director - Music **Stuart Williams**
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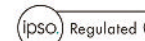
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 Chief executive **Edwin Evans-Thorne**
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 Chief financial officer **Henry Liddell-Saunders**
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WALK WITH US IN HELL

NINE ALBUMS IN, and *Lamb Of God* are more pissed off than ever. The American dream? Dead. Environmental pollution? Spiralling. Leaders? Corrupt. The apocalypse? Now. If you needed a soundtrack of discontent for 2022, new record *Omens* is it. During difficult times, there's comfort in sound – and there's a hell of a lot of catharsis on offer here. Plus, judging by LOG's headlining slot at Bloodstock last summer, their upcoming, aptly named *State Of Unrest* tour is going to be a collective rager.

Speaking of community, we went along to the emotional Taylor Hawkins Tribute Concert at Wembley Stadium – a staggering, six-hour celebration of the late, great Foo Fighters drummer, featuring an all-star line-up (see p.94). It was going to be, Dave Grohl promised, “a gigantic fucking night for a gigantic fucking person”. In the event, it wasn't just a celebration of Taylor's life, but a celebration of music itself and how it connects us. During many moments, the 90,000-capacity venue felt somehow intimate, and thanks to streaming, thousands more experienced the atmosphere at home.

In sillier news, Spooky Season is around the corner! Get yourself in the mood with our *Hellraiser* feature on p.72. He'll tear your soul apart...

Stay metal,



ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

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MEET THE BAND



DAVE EVERLEY
WRITER

When he's not cat-sitting or paddleboarding, Dave can be found handling Hammer's online content and commissioning/writing features for the mag. This issue, he looks back at the life of late Suicide Silence frontman Mitch Luckner.



EMMA COWNLEY
WRITER

Emma's written a ton of brilliant things for us online, and this issue marks her print debut. We asked her to revisit legendary horror movie *Hellraiser* – and the results were predictably terrifying. Thanks for the nightmares, Emma!



JOE DALY
WRITER

Joe Daly lives in San Diego (aka “a whale's vagina”). We sent him up the coast to Irvine, to hang out with rising Mongolian metallers The Hu, on tour with Megadeth and Five Finger Death Punch. Altogether now: “HU! HU! HU!”



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AND CAMBRIA



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THE BIG PICTURE

ADIOS, AMIGOS!

ON APRIL 17, 1982, Motörhead released *Iron Fist*, their fifth studio album and – for many – the last in a stratospheric run that had seen them climb the charts and conquer the rock’n’roll world. Granted, it didn’t match the chart-topping success of live album *No Sleep ’Til Hammersmith* (but then, no Motörhead album ever would) and nor was it as critically acclaimed as the iconic *Ace Of Spades*, but it did mark the final outing of the band’s ‘three amigos’ line-up: Lemmy Kilminster, ‘Fast’ Eddie Clarke and ‘Philthy Animal’ Taylor.

For a band that turned their nose up at the heavy metal tag, *Iron Fist* was a pretty metal outing. Put aside the fact the band are wearing studded outfits that even Rob Halford would raise an eyebrow at, and hefting about some cast iron-looking Snaggletooths, the tracks seethe with a palpable anger that seemingly reflected the less-than-happy marriage the band found themselves in. Eddie would depart Motörhead in May, ending the classic line-up that had terrorised eardrums the world over. Visually it might have been more Spinal Tap than Motörhead were generally comfortable with, but *Iron Fist* remains an iron-clad classic with an evergreen Lemmy motto: Don’t let the bastards grind you down. **H**

**THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY
BOXSET OF IRON FIST IS OUT
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THE HOT TOPIC

“AFRICA IS THE FUTURE OF METAL”

In his new book, author Edward Banchs meets the bands making an impact throughout the world's second-largest continent

WORDS: MATT MILLS

WHEN AUTHOR EDWARD Banchs released *Heavy Metal Africa* in 2016, he hoped it would help shine a spotlight on the metal scenes in, well, Africa. Based around his experiences travelling in countries including Botswana, South Africa, Kenya, Madagascar and Mauritius, he saw it as a way of highlighting a branch of ‘global metal’ that was being overlooked. Only, the reception to it wasn't quite what he had hoped.

“People saw African metal as a novelty,” he says with a frustrated sigh. “They completely missed that these were deep-rooted scenes of passionate metal fans.”

Six years on, Edward has returned to the subject for a sort-of sequel. Titled *Scream For Me Africa!*, his new book is no longer about just pointing out the existence of African metal

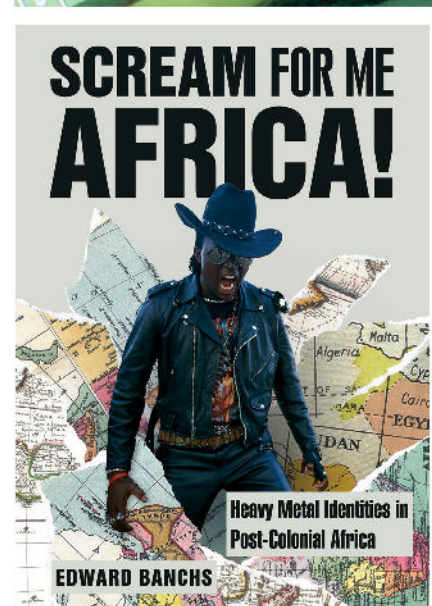
“THEY’RE SAYING, ‘STOP SEEING US AS EXOTIC ANIMALS’”

EDWARD BANCHS

bands, but exploring the ways that individual bands are refining heavy metal, chronicling his experiences spending time with bands from five countries – Botswana, Togo, South Africa, Kenya and Ghana – and how they’re using heavy metal to discuss everything from cultural ancestry to economic hardships and decolonial narratives.

“Instead of giving a loose history, I wanted a stronger dialogue around African metal as a whole,” Edward explains. “This time I was focusing on the lyrics that these bands were writing, and it was an open door to realising there’s this whole generation that has nothing to do with the colonial aspect of their lives but are still scarred by what colonialism did to them. In that sense, the music was a pushback. The word that comes up in certain circles of metal now is ‘de-colonialism’.”

This theme is prevalent from the first band featured, Arka’n Asrafokor. Dubbed “the only heavy metal band in Togo”, they fuse tight groove metal with traditional African instruments and rhythms, exploring aspects of



their Ewe culture. But as they see it, the music also has direct ties with African heritage as a whole.

“When I first listened to metal, it allowed me to communicate with my inner personality,” explains Arka’n singer and guitarist, Rock Ahavi.

“Everyone knows metal comes from hard rock, which comes from rock, which comes from blues. Blues was our ancestors’ music – I can feel the connection with all of this music and when I listen to metal, I know it’s a part of me and who I should be. African culture influences everything we do; think of the way I speak. I don’t speak English with an American or British accent, because I am African so have an African accent. So when we play rock and metal, it’s the same – we still express that with our own accents because that is our culture.”

Rather than any one homogenised scene, Edward’s book highlights the diversity in not only the sounds of each band, but the issues they face. While Arka’n Asrafokor have a strong focus



on environmental issues ("Humanity is losing its way. Arka'n are telling them to come back to the right place: to stop neglecting life itself," Rock explains), bands like Ghanaian rockers Dark Suburb explore the realities of life in slums. Another chapter explores how South Africa's apartheid history affected its metal community.

"I didn't realise how much of an authoritarian state [apartheid-era] South Africa was," the author admits. "The church and police department were synched, and metal shows were getting raided. Even putting on a metal show was a criminal act. Fans were arrested: they'd get thrown into the back of vans and have their hair forcibly cut."

But for all the obstacles African bands face, Edward feels metal is the perfect vehicle for them to confront complex social and political issues.

"No matter where it comes from, metal tends to be a confrontation of societal issues," he says. "It allows you to confront the norms you face not only in society, but your personal norms. Metal creates a safe space for difference, and I think that's why a lot

of African musicians have been attracted to it. They're sending out this message that is, 'Stop seeing us as exotic animals; we're just like you and have the same passions, goals and dreams that you do.'"

While Africa is still criminally overlooked in the metal world, its bands and musicians are steadily emerging into the spotlight. Whether it is Kenyan duo Duma offering a fascinating mix of grindcore and industrial, or Zambian-born musician Backxwash pioneering trap metal, African musicians are creating exciting new sounds and directions for heavy metal to explore. The way Rock sees it, that's par for the course.

"Africa is the future of metal," the musician declares. "It's the only continent that hasn't been discovered yet from a metal perspective. For me, lots of bands in the West are doing the same things – death metal, metalcore and so on – but in Africa we're finding something completely new." **H**

SCREAM FOR ME AFRICA! HEAVY METAL IDENTITIES IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA IS OUT NOW

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

MÅNESKIN ARE NSFW

The Eurovision winners weren't happy when their set at the MTV VMAs was censored after bassist Victoria De Angelis's top fell down. There was no problem with singer Damiano David wearing assless chaps, mind. Hmm.

THERE'S NO STOPPING MARY ON A CROSS

After the song's runaway success on TikTok and the charts, Ghost have released a special live video of it from their Imperatour.

OZZY'S NUMBER ONE!

The Prince Of Darkness became king of the charts in the US when *Patient Number 9* became his first No.1 on the Billboard 200. About time!



Yes, Ozzy! A long overdue No.1

GENE SIMMONS HAS NO MATES

At least that's what he said in a recent interview, admitting even Kiss co-founder Paul Stanley is more of a workmate.

THE TAYLOR HAWKINS TRIBUTE WAS A ONE-IN-A-LIFETIME SHOW

Rush, Queen, AC/DC, Metallica... So many iconic musicians turned up to the Foos' tribute gig at Wembley. More on p.94.

CLERKS III IS FULL OF METAL LOVE

King Diamond shirts, metal discussions, corpse-painted 'born again Satanists' – there's lots of shoutouts to heavy metal in Kevin Smith's latest movie.

DAMNATION LOOKS AMAZING

Jane Doe. Streetcleaner. Prowler In The Yard. Slaughter Of The Soul. Damnation 2022 has some insane album-in-full sets.

TOMMY LEE IS STILL WANGING ON

He pranked a stadium of fans in California by offering to show them "his wiener", before pulling out... a wiener dog. That poor, poor tiny dog.

NICKELBACK AREN'T METALCORE

Nickelback teased a heavy new single, but intro aside it sounds like... well, Nickelback. Still a banger, mind.

SABATON ARE RELEASING A MOVIE

The War To End All Wars has been made into a full-length musical motion picture and the band plan to release it in 2023.



WHAT COHEED SONG WOULD YOU PLAY TO AN ALIEN CIVILISATION?

Coheed And Cambria mastermind Claudio Sanchez tussles with your questions on The Amory Wars, the MCU and slitting a naked man's throat

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: JEREMY SAFFER

FOR 20 YEARS, Claudio Sanchez has been the master of concept albums. What began as a way for Coheed And Cambria's frontman to tell his life story through sci-fi has rocketed into a career-long series called The Amory Wars. In between his band's 10 albums, he's co-authored tie-in comic books with wife Chondra Echert and dabbled in novels, all while trying to get a film adaptation off the ground. We're amazed he has the time for interviews, to be honest. Nonetheless, *Hammer* was able to sit him down long enough to brave your burning questions.

How do you keep your hair so frizzy and lovely?

Becca Morton, Facebook

"I have certain products that I use, and I just try to keep it tame because it gets really wild fast. I run a brush through it in the shower with some conditioner, then I throw in this Jamaican castor oil. That leaves it somewhat relaxed."

How far do you plan each saga/album of The Amory Wars in advance? Is there an endpoint for the series?

Matt Wood, Facebook

"At this juncture, I think the end is *Vaxis V* [the band released *II* last June]. There's always room to manoeuvre, grow, expand and tell parallel stories about some of the participants and collateral damage of The Amory Wars. But I think, ultimately, *Vaxis V* could close off the saga in a really nice package. I know how they're going

to end. I've a broad idea of how I'm going to get to that ultimate goal, but a lot of the songs haven't been written yet. I'm really waiting for them to dictate how these stories will play out."

How do you feel about current comic book movie adaptations?

@the_archinerdd, Twitter

"They're fine. It's wild: when Coheed And Cambria first started, the idea that we were this comic book kind of thing really ostracised us from people. Not a lot of outlets took us seriously because comics weren't nearly as popular then as they are now, thanks to their adaptations into movies. In a way, I champion them because they make what we do normal. I don't get to see them nearly as often as I would have 10 years ago, though. I see them when I can and they're fine. They serve a purpose and I hope that at some

point they'll influence someone into finding an interest in our property."

I've heard rumours about a film adaptation from the Amory Wars comic books. Would a TV series be considered?

@DBecci, Twitter

"Yeah! Any format at this juncture is being considered. We've attempted a few things: at one point, Mark Wahlberg was involved. At another, we were working with a group of creators, and these things just didn't seem right. It's very important that it feels right."

Hammer: What happened with Mark Wahlberg?

"Not much, to be honest. It was just a connection sort of thing and eventually the arrangement disintegrated. As you go through the process, you spend the money and see, 'I could execute this as is, but will it destroy the integrity of the story?' Everything has to be right. It's too important to me and the other people involved to just make it for the sake of making it."

What Coheed And Cambria song would you play an alien civilisation?

Kathy Sekh, email

"It's tough, because I don't know what aggression looks like to an alien civilisation. One could say, 'Yeah, *Welcome Home*, because it's our most popular', but it's very aggressive. I'd have to have some sense of our visitors before choosing the tune, so *Welcome* ▶



It was inevitable *someone*
would ask about the hair...

**“THE IDEA THAT WE
WERE THIS COMIC
BOOK THING REALLY
OSTRACISED US”**

Home or A Disappearing Act, or honestly Window Of The Waking Mind.”

How does the real world affect what you write for The Amory Wars?

Josie Brun, Facebook

“It affects every facet of it. In a way, it’s a disguise for my autobiographical tale. It’s a way for me to express myself without wearing it on my sleeve. When I created the idea 20 years ago, it was because I was too shy to be a frontman. It was easy for me to create this facade to hide my stories behind.”

Hammer: Didn’t the ‘Amory’ part of the name come from the street you grew up on?

“Absolutely. That’s where I wrote a lot of [first three albums] *The Second Stage Turbine Blade*, *In Keeping Secrets Of Silent Earth: 3* and *Good Apollo... Volume One*. And all of the characters somewhat resemble people in my life. That’s one of the reasons why I play a character in the first Amory Wars saga.”

Do you have any more 80s song sequels planned, like *Jessie’s Girl 2*?

Connor Bohan, Facebook

“At this moment, no. They’re kind of random, and I’m still blown away that *Jessie’s Girl 2* even happened. Maybe I’m still riding on the excitement of that.”

Hammer: How would you react if someone wrote a sequel to a Coheed song? Would a ‘Welcome Home 2’ piss you off?

“Ha ha! I’d probably welcome it: it’d be funny. We would do that when we were coming up. If a song reminded us of the influence, before we had an actual name, we’d title it as a sequel. For example, the arrangement of *The Light & The Glass* reminded me of *Stairway To Heaven*, so before it came out it was called ‘Stairway To Heaven 2.’”

Do you plan on writing another non-Amory Wars album with the band?

@DrumDrumBoy, Twitter

“In 2016, I started working with a playwright and production company here in New York on a musical rendition of *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*. I wrote the first act, and after we finished *Vaxis II* I sent it to the band, like, ‘Hey, this is here. Maybe we could give this the Coheed treatment.’ That’s

“WE TOOK AN IMAGE OF A NAKED MAN AND CUT HIS THROAT”



Gerard Way... if you're reading this... give this man a call!

floating around. We haven’t executed anything, but it’s something we can throw in the vat because nothing ever happened with the musical.”

You’ve been touring for a fair few years now. What are your favourite venues to play and which have the best catering?

Ben Wilmott, Facebook

“I don’t know. The catering, I try to limit myself because, as I get older, I become stricter with the things I eat to ensure that the show goes off without any issues vocally. My favourite venues, it’s tough. I like everywhere we go, because it gives us an opportunity to explore the city. I enjoy finding myself in a new city every day because I can look on the map and find things I want to visit, whether it’s record stores, vintage toy stores or whatever – I’ve got a collection [of vintage toys] up here on the wall. There are a bunch of 12” vintage *Star Wars* figures. I’ve got a Freddy Krueger behind me. I’ve also picked up loads of synthesisers.”

What are your favourite memories of touring with Linkin Park?

Allie Sim, email

“The catering. Ha ha ha! The fact that they chose to take us out was so amazing. Coheed don’t get that kind of opportunity very often. I wasn’t too familiar with Linkin Park but, when those opportunities happen, we take them! That’s why we did Slipknot, Iron Maiden and Heaven & Hell. It reminds

me of being younger: that opportunity to win a new audience over. I enjoyed supporting Slipknot very much. They were all very welcoming, a nice set of people. They definitely have a hardcore audience but we were up for the challenge – so much so that [for our stage backdrop] we took an image of a naked man in the form of a crucifix and cut his throat. We just had all this macabre imagery, like, ‘We’ve gotta do something!’ Ha ha!”

Do you think you and Gerard Way will ever collaborate on a project, musical or otherwise?

Jayne Windmill, email

“I don’t know. Never say never. It would make sense seeing as we came up in the same scene and are comic creators.”

Do you actively consume sci-fi novels/comics? Are there any recent ones you’d recommend? If not, what’s your favourite of all time?

Frank Matheson, email

“Nothing at the moment, but my favourite sci-fi novel of all time is *Dune*. I think that it’s an amazing book and I love the way it ends. As far as movies, one of my favourites is [1983’s] *Krull*. It’s medieval science fiction that involves this star called the Glaive that has five blades coming out of it. That one I love so much that I have two original movie posters in one frame that I still haven’t hung up. Ha ha!”

VAXIS II: A WINDOW OF THE WAKING MIND IS OUT NOW VIA ROADRUNNER. COHEED AND CAMBRIA TOUR THE UK WITH THRICE IN OCTOBER

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THE SLAYLIST

YUKO MORINO

BlackLab's vocalist/guitarist reveals the bands that took her from Osaka to making a doom racket around the world

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

"**MÖTLEY CRÜE** GOT me interested in foreign metal music for the first time when I was a high school student. My boyfriend at the time was in a metal band and recommended the song *Live Wire* [from 1981 debut *Too Fast For Love*]. I love their first album the most, and the guitar tones are often referenced in BlackLab. I listened to the other metal bands that were on MTV at the same time, and I was into this type of music for a good few years. A colleague eventually invited me to play guitar in a covers band. We played songs from The Beatles, The Stooges, T. Rex and The Velvet Underground. The bands she recommended changed my view of music. **THE VELVET UNDERGROUND** sounded like they were from another world, especially *Venus In Furs*. This well-put-together and sophisticated music made me realise that what I'd heard before was merely easy on the ears. Their songs had raspy sounds, out-of-tune violins, rough guitar tones and Nico's gruff vocals. It made me realise that music could sound harsh and strange, but also be so cool and stylish. So different to the hair metal of Mötley Crüe!

"There are so many songs I'd like to mention, but I'm limiting myself to the ones that have greatly influenced my musical life. **THE STOOGES'** *I Wanna Be Your Dog* was the gateway that got me interested in punk rock. BlackLab is a doom/stoner band, but the music I create also contains the essence of punk rock. It's the result of freely creating what I want to express. **THE BEATLES'** *I Am The Walrus* completely changed the impression I had of the band until then, because I had never heard their psychedelic era. This period of their work went on to influence me so much when I come to write songs. Shortly after my covers band ceased

"VELVET UNDERGROUND'S MUSIC WAS HARSH AND STRANGE BUT ALSO COOL"

Yuko enjoys a vast melting pot of influences

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Head to tinyurl.com/BlackLabSlaylist to listen to Yuko Morino's Slaylist

activity, I encountered this brand new metal music that had a 70s flavour. That was *Welcome To The Jungle* by **GUNS N' ROSES**. I was hooked on them after seeing the music video on MTV, and Slash is still my guitar hero to this day.

"In the 90s, I formed a hardcore punk band called Depth with some friends. The drummer of Depth was Chia [Shiraishi], who I now play with in BlackLab. With them I shared what I'd discovered about so many alt rock and grunge bands. Most of them liked both 80s metal and 90s alt rock, but I was focused on the likes of Nirvana, Rage Against The Machine, Faith No More and Soundgarden. Among these, I liked listening to **THE SMASHING PUMPKINS** and **HELMET**. Riffs interwoven with open strings, like in *Cherub Rock*, and the irregular time signature riffs for the intro and the verse of *In The Meantime*, had a strong influence on me. While working in Depth, I often listened to songs from completely different genres: shoegaze, sadcore, electronica. I listened to **STEREOLAB's** *Metronomic Underground* and was so impressed that I started to collect their CDs. It reminded me of the stylish and artistic sensibility of The Velvet Underground. Moreover, while it has elements of krautrock and experimental, it's also sophisticated pop.

"I was shocked when I heard **SLEEP's** *Dragonaut* for the first time, on a compilation released by Earache Records. This encounter continues to influence my music today. Their heavy, dark riffs set the example for BlackLab's doom aspect. I haven't been able to discover much new music since the 00s, but **SLIPKNOT's** (*Sic*) blew away my boredom. It was released at the end of 90s, but I didn't know them until a little later. Many metal DJs spin this song, and when it comes on it makes my body move!" **H**

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AMY LEE IS a 21st-century metal icon. Blessed with true talent and a genuinely unique, sincere perspective, the young girl who started Evanescence back in 1995 and found fame with 2003's mega-hit *Bring Me To Life* has turned her band into superstars. Talking to *Hammer* over Zoom, she's as warm and friendly a personality as you'd wish to encounter, and it's not long before we realise that her list of achievements is so vast – taking in No.1s, collaborations and orchestral work – it's near-impossible to squeeze everything she's learned into a single hour.

BEING PART OF A BAND IS A BEAUTIFUL THING

"There's a lot of new fire now we've found Emma [Anzai, bassist]. It's like it was the universe telling us what Evanescence should be. I've found as I've gotten older to let the universe do that; you have to let go of your own plans. It certainly gives you a new energy when you're in this new, positive space. We really have something special, we feel like brothers and sisters, and we have good memories of all of our bandmembers."

YOU CAN'T CHANGE PEOPLE'S IDEAS OF WHO YOU ARE

"I don't get frustrated by negative representations of me, because they're just that – perceptions. One of the things that I've got better at doing over the years is tuning out people's misperceptions. People don't know all the details of how things work and what we've been through, so I can't get angry if they have a certain idea of me because they just don't know. I've been fighting for this band since I was a teenager, and I couldn't do it on my own, but I am the leader and the people that I work with love that I'm a leader. And I love their input. Mutual respect between bandmembers is crucial."

NOTHING COMPARES TO PLAYING LIVE

"We've been back since November of last year, and after not having live music for a while, being able to share that release, that beautiful thing that we all share when there are thousands of people in a room, that is such a release for my heart. It wouldn't be if I was just singing into the dark, so I'm grateful for what I do on a level that I couldn't have been when we were first out."

NEVER LET MONEY DICTATE YOUR ART

"You can't measure success in numbers and money. I really believe that if you're speaking from the heart and you put your whole heart into it, it's going to connect to people. The problem is people try and make money and try and survive, but it traps you. Commerce is the enemy of art, and in this day and age I feel like everybody is trying to sell me something, and I hate it, it makes me not believe."

I'VE SURPASSED MY OWN WILDEST EXPECTATIONS

"When I was a kid, I never could have seen this band going this far, and my dreams were huge! When I think about being 40 and seeing what we have become... I could never have seen that. I could only see my ideas and my musical vision; I didn't see where that could have taken me. But you have to embrace life and the beautiful madness of creation."



LIFE LESSONS

AMY LEE

Amy Lee talks childhood grief, catharsis through art and how Evanescence have surpassed her wildest expectations

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

BRING ME TO LIFE IS MUCH BIGGER THAN JUST ME

"*Bring Me To Life* is such a timeless part of my life. When I look back and think about the creation of the song, I thought it was great... but I didn't think it was any better than any of the other songs on the album. I guess that's why people can't replicate

"I'VE BEEN FIGHTING FOR THIS BAND SINCE I WAS A TEENAGER"

a hit, it's not a mathematical formula! That song just connected with people. It was just this veiled confession of feeling in love with my now husband when we weren't even together. It was a time I felt seen by somebody, when I'd never felt like I'd been seen by anybody. Twenty years later, there are people who have connected with that song in a similar way, and we are all part of that journey together now."

SONGS CAN BE ABOUT WHATEVER YOU WANT THEM TO BE

"People think they know what *Call Me When You're Sober* is about... I do generally write about the people around me, but I also write [so] different situations in my life can be applied [to songs later]. As it has been through the years, when I sing it now, I'm not thinking about a boyfriend from 15 years ago... I'm thinking about now. And that's got to be true of music in general."

LEARN FROM THE BEST

"I recently did a song with Dave Stewart from Eurythmics. We did a cover of [The Everly Brothers'] *Love Hurts*. Something cool I learnt from Dave was that he comes from an era where you really have to make choices. I came through being really inspired by that 90s wall of guitars, like Smashing Pumpkins; we throw so many combinations and tracks at the wall until we find something cool. Dave would see that he needed a guitar and quickly find that knack of finding that sound – three guitar tracks, one take of two of them, and three takes of the third one, and it was done! You can stack and stack and stack, but then you start to lose the unique quality that is just that one thing. If you make the choice, you hear it."

BROADEN YOUR HORIZONS AS FAR AND WIDE AS YOU CAN

"I really love contrast. I think that you can hear that in our music. So with a lot of the artists that I love, in the same vein as us, it's hard to find someone I want to collaborate with. It's when you find the biggest differences that you find the new colour. What that would be next, I don't know; I have an open mind. My true favourite thing that came out of the pandemic was this comic called *Bo Burnham*. He's a genius! Evanescence and comedy... it doesn't seem like it would work, but it might work for Amy Lee! How cool for him to be so real on such a profound level. If he wasn't, it wouldn't be so funny."

I'D DO ANYTHING TO WORK WITH TIM BURTON

"I love Tim Burton, but I've never been able to meet him. I got to meet Danny Elfman – he had me come over to his house. As a musician I'm a fan of both of them. I wanted to learn more about Danny's process! I would love to meet Tim Burton, but there would have to be a reason, there would need to be the right project, the right film. ▶

Think you know Amy Lee?
Think again





“I NEVER COULD HAVE SEEN THIS BAND GOING THIS FAR”

That would be a moment where you could just print up the tombstone. It's his contrast; everything is like a cartoon, the colours are like a dream of life, like a painting that's come to life. But, in addition, there is this part that is grief, or pain, or something really messed up that seems to come from a child's perspective. Which, having been through grief as a child, I really relate to.”

CHANNEL YOUR GRIEF INTO SOMETHING POSITIVE...

“When you're hurting, you grab on to anything that helps. That's why addiction is so high in people who are grieving. Music has been that addiction for me, a positive addiction, when you feel something so strong that it has to come out of your body. Sing it, paint it, express it. Art for me is always the way to get those things out, I don't feel the same just talking about it.”

... AND ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL

“My sister died when I was six, and it was just me and my parents again, and in that moment, I went into a mode of wanting to protect my parents' hearts. I didn't allow myself a lot of outward grief, I didn't want to add to their pain. So, my inner voice – the time I spent with myself and the things that I would create – became this very dear friend to me. It was only years later that I realised I could take those things and turn them into something healing.”

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE BEING PART OF AN ORCHESTRA

“I love working with all different musicians and artists, the classical world works in so many different ways. It's strict; they're on a schedule and if you go over, it's over. It's terrifying, but exciting! You're working with these high-level musicians who have done their work, they can read music, and it just feels like a tightrope – at any moment it could come crashing down. You're not tied down to a click track, you're working to the movements of the conductor's baton. The energy created by the focus makes it so gratifying when the sound comes out. So many pieces, so many people, all creating one tiny fraction, making something so much bigger than myself... it's really special.” 

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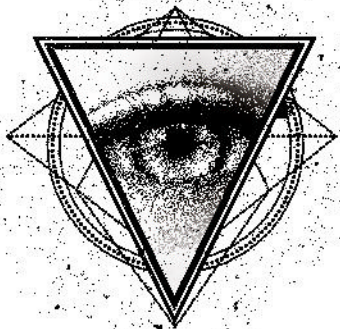
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IN THE STUDIO IN FLAMES

The world's gone to shit – and it's giving In Flames their ferocity back, says singer Anders Fridén

WORDS: MATT MILLS

WHEN IN FLAMES released single *State Of Slow Decay* in June, many people rejoiced. After years of fobbing off the melodeath genre they helped define in favour of metalcore and softer alt metal, they'd re-embraced thrashing rhythms and athletic guitar leads. That juggernaut, which was followed by the anthemic *The Great Deceiver*, was the world's first taste of their 14th album, *Foregone*. Frontman Anders Fridén vows that the rest of the record will follow suit, aggravated by a world-pausing pandemic and humanity's shithouse behaviour.

Is this album a throwback to classic In Flames?

"It's a mix between the past, the present and wherever we're going. This fucking pandemic brought out so much frustration and anger. Me and Björn [Gelotte, guitars] talked about how – as much as I love the guys we're working with, like [producer] Howard Benson – we were missing that guitar attack. The driving force of In Flames is the mix between melody and aggression, and we've been lacking that for a little bit."

When did you have that conversation?

"Before anything was written. We talked about it when we were gearing up for the album. This is the album we had to do. I think he felt frustrated, and I felt frustrated sitting at home, as well as over the state of the world in general."

Why did you find the pandemic so frustrating?

"It cut off the *I, The Mask* touring cycle and we had to go home. For that first

year, it was: 'The world's gonna open again.' Then the world shut down again! I didn't get to see Björn – he's in Gothenburg and I'm in Stockholm – so when we finally got back in a room together, this fucking thing ignited!"

Are the lyrics about how you viewed the world during the pandemic?

"On *The Great Deceiver*, I sing about 'a two-year break to reset our brains', and that was me hoping. I felt that the world was on pause and that we'd come out the other side as better people. But it's gone in the other direction. The world is more hostile. You can't say this, can't say that, everyone's pointing fingers. The pandemic was over and then there is a war in Europe. All of that is fuelling the lyrics on this album."

How representative are *State Of Slow Decay* and *The Great Deceiver* of the rest of the music on the album?

"I think we have a wide variety of songs. It's not like we dropped the two heaviest songs and the rest are ballads. Ha ha! To me, this is the best representation of In Flames. I am fucking stoked! I think people will be surprised."



Anders Fridén and producer Howard Benson: cranking out melodeath goodness

By what?

"That it's that good! Ha ha!"

This is your first album with Chris Broderick on guitar. Is he officially a member? And is Niclas Engelin well and truly out of the band?

"Chris is the guitar player of In Flames, together with Björn, for sure. Niclas is busy doing other stuff, so yeah."

Does Chris have songwriting credits?

"Björn and I write the bulk of the material – like the structures of the songs, the riffs and the lyrics – but Chris has been writing some solos. Björn and I feel so excited about this line-up; we've been touring for a while and we took all of that energy into the studio."

You're touring Europe with At The Gates soon. How will their fans take to the new material?

"Great! We were brought up together: Tomas [Lindberg, At The Gates' singer] and I lived in the same neighbourhood. Musically, In Flames and At The Gates drifted apart, but now we are back together on the same path. I think it really works. If you miss this tour, I don't know what's wrong with you." **H**

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THE FACTS

ALBUM:
14

STUDIO:
West Valley
Recording Studios,
Los Angeles
(instruments) /
Howard Benson's
home studio
(vocals)

PRODUCER:
Howard Benson

EXPECT:
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metal riff attack
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THE STORY BEHIND DEAD IN HOLLYWOOD MURDERDOLLS

How a punk rock song inspired by classic horror movie posters helped launch one of the most unique and beloved bands of the early 2000s

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

BEFORE HE FOUND international fame as the gravel-throated frontman of Murderdolls, Wednesday 13 was just Joseph Poole, an aspiring musician still living at home with his parents in the late 90s. Granted, at night he'd dress up and front cult horror-punk crew Frankenstein Drag Queens From Planet 13, but, a couple of albums in, fame hadn't come knocking and he was still writing most of his songs from his childhood bedroom.

"My guitar was just sat in the corner, and that's where most of my songs for Frankenstein Drag Queens were written," he recalls. "We were a punk band, but I always loved a little element of metal. White Zombie, Pantera, Megadeth, Anthrax... so I was always trying to come up with something a little heavier. I remember worrying that one song sounded too much like *Symphony Of Destruction*. It was mean-sounding, and I'm looking around my room and see my Frankenstein poster. I instinctively went, 'Hey Frankenstein, what's on your mind?' and then there was a Dracula poster, and I went round the whole room the same way."

The song Wednesday wrote was christened *Hooray For Horrorwood* and would be included on the Drag Queens' 1999 album, *Songs From The Recently Deceased*. It was a clear standout track

on the album. "I thought, 'Well, we've got something here,'" Wednesday says. "We went into the studio, recorded it and had it mixed. I remember our bass player, Seaweed, putting it on in the car and we both got goosebumps: 'We made a fucking cool song!'"

Frankenstein Drag Queens were something of an underground, cult concern, but in time word began to get out about the band, ultimately reaching the ears of Slipknot drummer Joey Jordison. After a brutal promotional campaign for Slipknot's second album, *Iowa*, there was tension in the band, with members heading off to pursue their own projects. For Wednesday, that meant he was about to get a call that would change his life.

"Joey heard the song and liked it, but he said, 'I don't really like the chorus!'" Wednesday recalls. "He said, 'I have this songtitle called *Dead In Hollywood* and I think we can do this...' That was when I realised that Joey and I could make something really cool, and that we could work together. He made all our songs better, and that was the first song that we collaborated on."

The chemistry between Wednesday and the late, great Joey was strong. The almost telepathic intuition of how they wanted their music to sound meant that the recording process for

THE FACTS RELEASED: 2002

ALBUM:
Beyond The Valley Of The Murderdolls

PERSONNEL:
Wednesday 13
(vocals, bass, guitar, programming),
Joey Jordison
(guitar, bass, drums, percussion, keyboards), Tripp Eisen (guitar)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
54 (UK)



Murderdolls' debut album, *Beyond The Valley Of The Murderdolls*, was a breeze.

"If anyone ever saw us together, they would know we had an instant connection," smiles Wednesday. "I used to say to Joey, 'When I have drums in my head when I write a song, you instantly play them exactly how they sound in my head. You're the only person I've met who can do that.'"

"I never had that with anyone before. That's why it's such a sad thing to lose him, because I'll never have that relationship with someone like that again. We had more work ahead of us, for sure."

Although Wednesday had written the majority of the songs prior to the recording of *Beyond...*, many taken from his previous project, he credits Joey with playing an integral role in improving the songs far beyond their original versions.

"He made it sound like a big band, not a garage band – we were primed to be arena rock," recalls Wednesday. "He loved drumming, but Joey was a great guitar player. He loved Keith Richards, Mick Mars, Angus Young... and he got to get up there and show that. I remember my friend coming to pick me up from the airport after I had finished all my parts. I got in the car and said, 'Put the CD in!' and he goes,



Murderdolls (left to right): Ben Graves, Wednesday 13, Joey Jordison, Acey Slade, Eric Griffin

‘Holy shit!’ He had only heard my old stuff, and here was the slick, produced version of what we were now.”

Around this time, Wednesday 13 started to realise things were about to change. When *Hammer* asks if he felt like he was about to become a rock star, we get a definitive, one-word answer: “Yes!” He elaborates: “We went out on tour to Japan, and while we were out there, the day the album came out, we opened for Guns N’ Roses.

“This was a fast thing; we went from playing in front of 100 people to playing in front of 30,000 people! We went out and played the first song, everybody was jumping, and that’s when I realised I could do this for the rest of my life. I was just thinking, ‘I wrote these songs in my parents’ house!’, but once I got my foot in the door, I wasn’t getting it out!”

Despite fan acclaim, the expectations from their label were still fairly low for Murderdolls.

“Roadrunner were OK with letting Joey and Corey [Taylor] do their side-project thing,” Wednesday remembers. “Like, ‘Go do your thing, if it does something, great, but it’s never gonna compare to Slipknot.’ But both bands [Murderdolls and Stone Sour] ended up being massively successful. I’m not sure they saw that coming!”

“I WORRIED MY SONG SOUNDED TOO MUCH LIKE SYMPHONY OF DESTRUCTION”

WEDNESDAY 13

Thankfully, the label’s hands-off approach also afforded the group some freedom – which was lucky, as

Joey was in no mind to compromise his ideas for the band.

“I remember when we were going to put out the *White Wedding* single, we had a meeting with this label guy who was pitching the treatment to us,” Wednesday says. “He’s going, ‘OK, so you guys are at this house party and all your fans are there going crazy. It’s kinda like... Good Charlotte!’ The second he heard the words ‘Good Charlotte’, Joey just said, ‘Fuck. You.’ and hung up the call. I thought that was amazing! They might have wanted to tone us down and have us not be so outrageous, but it never would have happened.”

Released on August 20, 2002, *Beyond The Valley Of The Murderdolls* had an immediate impact on global audiences. It reached both the UK Top 40 album chart and the US Billboard 200. More significantly, in a metal scene that was still clinging to the now-rotting corpse of nu metal, Murderdolls felt like the most exciting band to come along since, well, Slipknot.

“It was a weird time. Nu metal was on the way out it seemed,” Wednesday muses. “We were that band that came in and made people go, ‘Who are these guys?’, because we were this mixture of Mötley Crüe and Sex Pistols with a little bit extra put in.”

Dead In Hollywood was the first single released from the record, and just missed out on a Top 50 placement in

“THERE IS NO MURDERDOLLS WITHOUT JOEY”

WEDNESDAY 13

the UK singles chart when it peaked at No.54. But, as is appropriate for a song inspired by the art of classic horror movies, it was the music video that really helped Murderdolls capture the imagination of metalheads worldwide. An explosion of punk rock, make-up and horror imagery raging through the song's sleazy riffing in a filthy operating room, the video further set the band apart from anything else going on at the time.

“Where we filmed that video is where they filmed [2002 movie] *Resident Evil*,” Wednesday recalls. “It was an abandoned hospital that went three levels underground. People said it was haunted because there was an actual morgue down there. It was my first professional video shoot and it was weird, I was like a kid in a candy store! I’d been waiting my whole life to do a video. I felt like I was in Kiss for a few minutes!”

Of course, Joey tragically passed away last year, so Murderdolls are no more. Twenty years on from those early days, Wednesday is aware that the song, the album and the band that he took such pride in still impact his fans to this day.

“With the time off we’ve had with the pandemic, I’ve been able to interact with my fans a lot,” he says. “I get to hear about how that was a moment in time for them that remains special. They talk about that album in the same way that I talk about [David Bowie’s] *Ziggy Stardust*, which is an honour for me.”

For Wednesday, the memories and feelings attached to that time are still some of the fondest of his career.

“It was special,” he smiles. “It was a crazy time. I had just turned 26 and it was the first time a member of Slipknot had unmasked, so we had all these eyes on us. It’s a perfect, great, cult record and the longer it goes, the more people wanna know about it. Who knows what the legacy of it will be in another 20 years?! But both of the records we did together are two of the prize records that I have done. It’s sad that it can never be replicated, because there is no Murderdolls without Joey, but I’m proud of our legacy.” ■

THE NEW WEDNESDAY 13 ALBUM, *HORRIFIER*, IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM



Murderdolls still hold a very special place in their fans' hearts

GETTY/MICK HUTSON

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FRI 16th DECEMBER 2022
MANCHESTER O₂ RITZ

SAT 17th DECEMBER 2022
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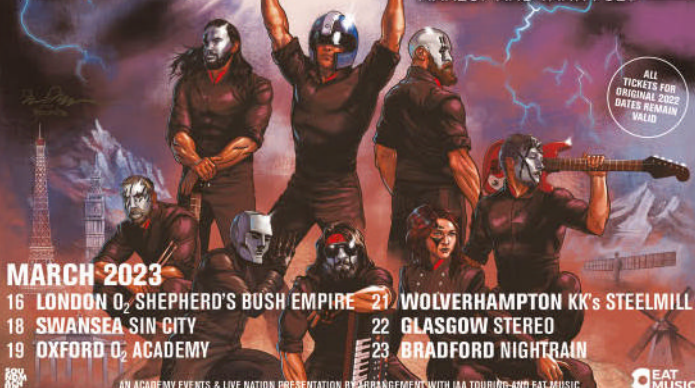
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19 OXFORD O₂ ACADEMY 23 BRADFORD NIGHTRAIN

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YOUR SHOUT

WHAT MORE COULD A MAGGOT WANT?

...and other heapings of praise, shade and everything in between concerning our nine-variant Slipknot cover, plus stories on Lacuna Coil, Ozzy Osbourne, Electric Callboy and beyond

TOP KNOT

Brilliant job on the Slipknot story in the new *Hammer*. Cuts right through the doom and gloom, got me so, so, so, so excited for the new album and hints to some mad stuff in the band's future. What more could a Maggot want?

Michal Beech, Facebook

You've hit the nail on the head, Michal! We're also very excited to see what 'Knot have in store for us and Morat did a spectacular job setting the stage for the next step in their evolution.

NINE NEIN

Who needs nine versions of the Slipknot cover? Corey, Clown, maybe Mick – everyone else is surplus to requirement.

Chloe Bell, Twitter

Ah Chloe, you've clearly not cottoned on to the insane levels of love for Tortilla Man! Besides, JUST LOOK AT HOW GOOD THEY LOOK.

SEEN QUEEN

In a world of Halestorm and Pretty Reckless, I feel Cristina Scabbia gets fairly overlooked as a major part of female

representation in rock music, and Lacuna Coil don't get the props they deserve for the doors they've kept open for the new wave of fantastic bands now at the top and coming through. They continue to get better and better as time goes on! The Q&A with her was a top read. Shame she felt *Delirium* wasn't up to scratch. It was a magnificent record with some of my favourite LC workings contained.

Mark Ashworth, email

We're glad you enjoyed, Mark! Cristina is a beloved icon of our scene, so any chance to celebrate her work is a no-brainer.

FICKLEBACK

Surprise, surprise – 20 years since they became massive and suddenly people are realizing that Nickelback are actually brilliant.

With that new heavy song, how's about you get them in *Hammer*?

Lauren Badger, Facebook

Erm, good as that new Nickelback song is, Lauren, we're not sure it's massively metal. Then again, the band do have a bit of metal cred, so never say never!

BLUB WAR

I had no idea how much Benji Webbe had been through. It really does go to show that even if you're the most fun person on the planet you can still have struggles – genuinely made me get cry thinking of all those times Skindred have made our nights at festivals, gigs etc. We love you, Benji!

Kimmi <3, Twitter

Exactly, Kimmi. Everyone knows Benji is one of the best frontmen

#TWEETS

Musicians become popular and dial down the weirdness when they should really do the opposite
Backxwash
(@backxwash)

Seriously. If you know anyone suffering, struggling, alone or just on your mind, call them. Call them today. Tell them you were thinking of them. Making someone's day could help someone's life.

Ginger Wildheart, The Wildhearts
(@gingerwildheart)

Amazing send off for the Queen. Nobody does it like Britain.

End of an era. Love the quote 'grief is what you pay for love'.

Geezer Butler, Black Sabbath
(@geezerbutler)

My manager and I play a game called "Tweets not sent," where I text him things that I'm dying to tweet but know would get me in trouble.

Mark Morton, Lamb Of God
(@MarkDuaneMorton)

Part bloke, part delicious dinner... it's Tortilla Man!

Cristina Scabbia: credit where it's due, please



in metal, but few realise just how much it took for him to get there.

NOW MORE TEARS

We're so lucky to still have Ozzy Osbourne, so was really happy to see him pop up in the new *Hammer*. Watching footage of him onstage now really does remind us that he won't be around forever – and I've cried more than once thinking about never seeing him again.

Steve Thornton, email

We know what you're saying Steve, but all isn't lost just yet. As Oz told us last issue, he's still raring to go and absolutely determined to hit the road again next year. All our fingers (and toes) are crossed!

GHOST MALONE

Cradle Of Filth are working with Ed Sheeran. I give it six months before Ghost and Post Malone announce a collab.

SeasonsInTheDiss, Twitter

And why not?! It's about time metal and pop culture aligned again and we won't pretend we're not

interested to see how the Cradle/Sheeran collab pans out.

HYPY HYPE YEAH

Thought you were mad for doing a feature with Eskimo Callboy. "That band that did the daft *Hypa Hypa* video?" I thought. Then I read and checked the album out. All over it – daft in the best way, put a massive smile on my face.

Reece Smalling, Facebook

And therein lies the beauty, Reece! Yes, Electric Callboy (they've changed their name, pal!) are silly, but they write massive bangers and we all could use a bit of silly from time to time.

STONE BITTER

So Corey Taylor kicked Jim Root out of Stone Sour, and that band started to suck. Now he wants to do a new band with Jim. Why not just make Stone Sour great again?

Jemma Ray, Facebook

The way we see it Jemma, this just means we have a whole new project to get excited about!

THE BIG DEBATE

James Hetfield proved impervious to fans' criticisms and jeers about *St. Anger* when Metallica dusted off *Dirty Window* for their recent live shows, reopening a debate that has been raging for almost 20 years...

HE SAID

"Oh come on, it's growing on you now. Just give it a little more time buddy, you'll get it!"

YOU SAY

Fans always want the band to write the same album over and over. How boring! *St. Anger* was awesome!

Bobby Albright, Facebook

If you get *St. Anger*, you've been through some tough times... It never made sense to me until life hit me!

Max Riffage, Twitter

It gives folks an intermission for a toilet/beer break.

Kevin Miles, Facebook

People give Metallica shit for the snare sound. But a ton of modern metal bands do it the same and get no heat.

Chris C, Twitter

St. Anger is the reason why I started listening to Metallica.

Tina Davis-Miller, Facebook

Lol "Give it time" he said, 20 years after the fact.

Randall Sandrich, Facebook

First time I saw Metallica was on the *St. Anger* tour and those songs are f###ing amazing to hear live.

John es Fantastico, Twitter

Nice sense of humor. Maybe it's time to give a chance to *St. Anger*.

Oscar Ortega, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers



LAMB OF GOD

Omens

"The pissed-off soundtrack for 2022"

ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR



THE OTOLITH

Folium Limina

"Subrosa are reborn, and this is a new transformative journey into the storm"

JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR



LAMB OF GOD

Omens

"Groovy and thoroughly pissed-off. Just what the doctor ordered"

VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR



CLUTCH

Sunrise On Slaughter Beach

"Chock-full of bangers. Clutch always bring the Friday feeling"

LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR



LAMB OF GOD

Omens

"Colossal grooves, massive hooks and utter nihilism – what more could you want from Lamb Of God?"

RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER



LORNA SHORE

Pain Remains

"Boom, shake the room! Deathcore gets an almighty refit for the 2020s"

DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



NEW NOISE SONJA

Ex-Absu guitarist makes a triumphant return with traditionally inspired heavy metal

WORDS: ROSIE ESTHER SOLOMON • PICTURES: DON VINCENT ORTEGA

SONJA MIGHT BE a new name in our scene, but they're influenced by primal forces. Frontwoman Melissa Moore is into the occult, and is fascinated by what she describes as "dark energies" and "forces outside of human comprehension". They also take inspiration from the likes of Mercyful Fate, Venom and Judas Priest – "Those classic bands that people think are cheesy, but I think are great. It's like performative masculinity," Melissa grins.

But Sonja's music, now finally seeing the light on their debut, *Loud Arriver*, isn't just throwback traditional heavy metal. Melissa also name-drops Type O Negative, Anathema and My Dying Bride as influences. "We take these dark, sad elements and bring some King Diamond wickedness and energy into it," she says.

One way of describing Sonja's sound, regardless of genre, is 'nihilistic'. "We aren't trying to aspire to any greater meaning," Melissa says. "You could die any second – all that is guaranteed is the experience of the now. So we might as well experience rock'n'roll. It's liberating."

Rock'n'roll wasn't always Melissa's MO – she earned acclaim as the guitarist for Texan black metallers Absu. "Black metal is very easy for me," she affirms. "It's in my DNA. Sonja is much more of a challenge. When we heard a Sonja demo back, we realised we needed to slow everything down – our instincts were to play much faster."

It's unsurprising that speed was so ingrained. Melissa played guitar in Absu for eight years, until 2017, when she claims she was fired after she came out as transgender. At the time, she wasn't only the lead guitarist; she did

the band's admin, booked their shows and co-wrote a substantial amount of the music. She trusted her bandmates. After taking oestrogen on tour with Absu for a year, and beginning to physically transition in secret, Melissa was fired via text message soon after coming out to the rest of her band.

"My bandmates were some of the first people I came out to," she says. "We were very close because of the music, but also as friends."

But Melissa intuited that her identity was not something her bandmates could or would ever accept. "Me and Grzesiek [Czapla, Absu drummer, the sole member who left with Melissa to form Sonja] both felt that the last show of that tour was going to be the last show for Absu as we knew it. No one acknowledged it, but I remember holding my guitar in the air after the last song, and I could feel that that was it. I was fired a few weeks later."

It wasn't just the band that Melissa lost, it was the confidence to play music. Having started Sonja some time before, it would be years until she felt that this ambitious project would be ready to share with the world. "Music, the way that I got through life, the power that I had, was pulled out from under me, at the most difficult time of my life... it was devastating."

Loud Arriver is an apt name for the debut of someone who's been through hell and emerged triumphant and defiant. Taking her time to find her voice, Melissa eventually felt able to front this new band that represented so much for her. "I'm not the vocalist of Sonja because I'm a particularly skilled vocalist. I'm the singer because I don't trust anyone else to be the energy of this band," she says. "Ultimately,

being a trans person, I thought it was important to make sure the lyrics weren't just there to fill the space. At first, I didn't feel like I had the right to be the voice of something; I didn't want to represent other people wrongly. But I can't pretend to speak for some monolithic type of person. I have to be honest to myself. I can play guitar, I can sing and I got a band, so I can do what I want!"

What this first record with Sonja represents, then, is a chapter in Melissa's story. "Half the lyrics on *Loud Arriver* were written before I came out and half after," she explains.

Album standout *Daughter Of The Morning Star*, told through a gauze of occult imagery, represents Melissa speaking to herself about hiding her true nature. "It was written before I ever realised that I would be able to transition. That was a song in which I was acknowledging something inside me that I've always tried to hide."

Despite her negative experiences in Absu, she still feels like she belongs in the metal scene. It's part of her identity, and always will be. "I don't think queer people need to be accepted into metal. Metal and queerness are the same thing. I am a trans person and I am metal. I play metal. I consider myself to be the definition of metal and I happen to be trans. Those two things are one and the same."

And the future? Well, for Melissa, it looks bright. "I'm excited to play live as Sonja. I think rock'n'roll is becoming what it should be. I don't think a metal show is a hostile environment for a queer person anymore." ■

LOUD ARRIVER IS OUT NOW VIA CRUZ DEL SUR

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

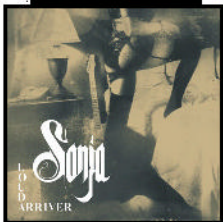
Bleak yet empowering gothic-occult rock'n'roll

FOR FANS OF:

King Diamond, Witchfinder General, Candlemass

LISTEN TO:

Daughter Of The Morning Star



**“YOU COULD DIE ANY
SECOND, SO WE MIGHT
AS WELL EXPERIENCE
ROCK’N’ROLL”**

MELISSA MOORE



NEW NOISE

RAIN CITY DRIVE

Formerly known as Slaves (US), the guys are back with a new frontman and a new name

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS



IN 2019, THE Californian band formerly known as Slaves were in the middle of a European tour when they sacked their singer for addiction-related issues. Wasting no time, they hired friend-of-a-friend Matt McAndrew, a contestant on the US version of *The Voice*, as an emergency stand-in. It was a daunting task for the singer, who hopped on a plane from LA to the UK without knowing the band's music and had to make up lyrics onstage on the fly. "Those type of things always pay off big if they work out," he smiles. "And in this case, it's been really great."

The band had performed under their previous moniker for seven years, but with Matt on the mic and a new energy in the camp, they felt it was time for a rebrand. Following the release of their 2020 album, *To Better Days*, the band changed their name to Rain City Drive, a homage to the perennially overcast skies of Manchester, where the current line-up played their first gig together.

"Changing a name can be a tricky thing to do," continues Matt. "It could have crashed and burned, but it didn't. I'm thinking of it as a new band. We wanted something the five of us could really take ownership of and that represented us."

The quintet's latest, self-titled record sees them head in a more melody-driven direction, fusing slick pop sensibilities with searing metal influences to create a sound that's ready to blow the roof off arenas.

"Right before I did *The Voice*, I saw Bring Me The Horizon touring *Sempiternal*," recalls Matt. "I loved that record, how they fused the heavy stuff with anthemic songwriting. We're trying to write rock music as though it's still the biggest genre."

We want to write songs that could appeal to the masses... although maybe they have a little more distortion in them!"

RAIN CITY DRIVE IS OUT NOW VIA THRILLER

IN SHORT

FOR FANS OF: Bring Me The Horizon, Bad Omens, Modern Error

SOUNDS LIKE: Metal, pop and R'n'B collide to form skyscraper-sized anthems

LISTEN TO: *Blood Runs Cold*



DEFACING GOD

The Danes compelled by Lilith to fuse melodeath and symphonic black metal

WORDS: ALEX DELLER • PICTURES: NIKOLAJ BRANSHOLM

GIVEN WHAT THEY'VE achieved with their debut album, you could be forgiven for thinking some mysterious feat of witchcraft helped haul Defacing God fully formed from the fertile Scandinavian soil. Sadly, the reality is more prosaic: they formed in 2015 and have spent the years since experimenting, finding and honing a sound that expertly splices scything melodeath, craggy black metal and magnificent classical pomp.

"I had a clear vision that this should be all or nothing," explains vocalist Sandie 'The Lilith' Gjørtz. "Doing things half-assed is a complete waste of time to me."

While this tale of craft and graft might disappoint those hoping for devilish pacts, there's still plenty of mystery pumping through their veins. "We try to pull listeners into a dark universe of obscure myths, folklore and ancient stories," says Sandie. "The album draw parallels to the ancient, but also the present world where many people still have to fight for freedom and justice. A world where there are still people being oppressed and held down because of their gender, ethnicity or personal conviction."

Central to the album is the defiant figure of Lilith – the pre-Eve figure banished from Eden for not kowtowing to Adam. "Lilith is actually not a person as such to me," explains Sandie. "In reality, 'she' is more a philosophy. 'She' is the way I see the world, the way I act and interact. For me, 'she' stands for independence, female power and empowerment. 'She' stands for rebellion, strong opinions and sisterhood. Always be a Lilith!"

THE RESURRECTION OF LILITH IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Carefully layered heavy metal dividing its time between cold-blooded savagery and sweeping cinematic orchestration

FOR FANS OF: At The Gates, Dimmu Borgir, Septicflesh

LISTEN TO: *Echoes From Fulda*

HOAXED

Dark rock debutants explore the magic of the Pacific Northwest

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT • PICTURES: SHIMON KARMEL

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

A midnight excursion into a haunted forest

FOR FANS OF:

Blackwater Holylight, Chelsea Wolfe, Unto Others

LISTEN TO:

The Call

WITH A NAME like 'Hoaxed,' it's appropriate that this Oregon-based, dark rock two-piece aren't entirely what they seem on first impressions.

"I want to write music that people need to think about. I never want to write music that's easy to spoon feed," proclaims vocalist/guitarist Kat Keo.

Formed in 2020, Kat and drummer Kim Coffel garnered attention with their self-titled 2021 EP of shadowy, contemplative gloom, and signed to Relapse Records that same year.

Two Shadows, their forthcoming debut album, tiptoes across stoner and gothic rock through to sparkling shoegaze, and is transfused with the muddled, rain-ridden landscapes of their hometown of Portland and the "dark magic"-infused tales of the American South. "It's just easier to

write gloomy things where the weather fosters that type of attitude," says Kim.

On *Two Shadows*, which doubles up as the name of the ghoulish fictional town the album explores, each song tells its own story. "It's not exactly Hell, but it's some other weird world," says Kim. "It all ties back to life and reality. It addresses our ideas, fears, anxieties and the problems that you're maybe trying to escape from."

Enchanting and inescapably dark, it pulls upon the macabre, exploring stories of witch prosecutions, folklore and murder. "It's very powerful," says Kat, speaking of their esoteric element. "I'm somewhat scared to mess with it, because I think there's some danger behind it. That's very intriguing." **H**

TWO SHADOWS IS OUT ON OCTOBER 28 VIA RELAPSE

"I WANT US to be the most pissed-off, heavy band possible." Spite's frontman, Darius Tehrani, has a vision. The Californians have just launched their fourth record, *Dedication To Flesh*, an album that takes the established deathcore template and adds even more hardcore bite. "It's a clean slate for us," he explains. "But still very much Spite."

When people listen to *Dedication To Flesh*, Darius wants the music to come screeching out of the speakers and grab people by the throat. From the brutalising breakdowns of *Crumble* or *Made To Please* to the slamming *Caved In* and short – but certainly not sweet – *Hangman*, with its off-kilter riff and Darius's voracious howl, the album is all about offering catharsis.

"Lyrically, it's full of depression, anxiety and shit that fuels that kind of anger and rage," says the singer. "Something you can release when you listen."

But as pissed off and heavy as they are, Spite still have lofty ambitions: they want to conquer the world.

"I want Spite to be a household name, like Slipknot, or Slayer," declares Darius. "This album is our footprint in the face of the music scene." **H**

DEDICATION TO FLESH IS OUT NOW. SPITE WILL TOUR THE UK IN NOVEMBER

SPITE

Californian deathcore bruisers out to conquer the world

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL



IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

Running face-first through a wall of emotion

FOR FANS OF:

Suicide Silence, Chelsea Grin, Lorna Shore

LISTEN TO:

Caved In

IN THE KNOW

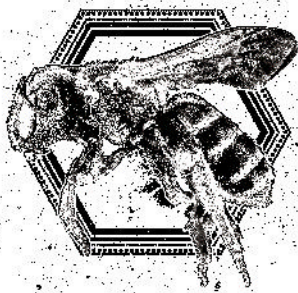
What your favourite bands are listening to



FLORENCE BLACK

"THERE'S THIS BAND from Wales called Florence Black. I've watched them grow over the past couple of years, the hard work they have put in is astounding, and they've got some brilliant rock tunes. I actually drove past their drummer once digging ditches on the side of the road – that's some proper work ethic there. And even after releasing an album and playing shows, they're still hungry. So shoutout to that band."

BENJI WEBBE, SKINDRED



HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month



KISS CREATURES OF THE NIGHT 40TH ANNIVERSARY SUPER DELUXE EDITION

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EARLY CLASSICS ASIDE, Kiss are rarely cited as a great 'albums band', but *Creatures Of The Night* is an anomalous, early-80s gem that really does hold up 40 years later. With typical understatement, the band have expanded it to a slightly implausible five discs, featuring a remastered version of the original *Creatures...* and several hours of live material, outtakes and rarities. Also boasting a replica of the album's 1982 tour programme, plus posters, bumper stickers, trading cards, glow-in-the-dark picks, badges and an iron-on patch, this box set is almost classy enough to warrant the exorbitant price tag. Kiss diehards will, of course, simply shriek "Take my money!", while less committed fans will be better served by the triple vinyl not-quite-as-deluxe edition.

tinyurl.com/kiss-deluxe



W.A.S.P. BOOK

£275

'Book like a beast', surely? Anyway, this coffee table tome chronicles W.A.S.P.'s hedonistic heyday through Ross Halfin's camera lens. It's wrapped in recycled leather, signed by former W.A.S.P. axeman Chris Holmes, and front-loaded with COCK.

tinyurl.com/wasp-book



VIKING BOWL

£34-70

Handcrafted, flame-treated, indebted to the Sámi traditions of northern Scandinavia. Inscribed with ancient runes. Big enough to slosh 11oz of your enemy's blood in – that's what the Skarsgårds do. Apparently.

tinyurl.com/kusca-cup



HELLOWEEN BOX SET

£139.99

This whopping box set features the band's 2021 LP alongside six pins, a necklace and a goddamn clock. Presumably you'll use the latter item to count down the hours 'til your next paycheck, after ponying up for this...

tinyurl.com/pumpkin-box



BALROG POP! VINYL

£23.99

You shall not pass! Because you'll be too busy going "N'awwwwwww!" Yes, the Balrog of Moria has been reduced to a mere six-inch Pop! Vinyl, joining legends like Freddie Mercury, Slipknot, and Donkey from *Shrek*. tinyurl.com/balrog-pop



BLACK FLAME CANDLE

£27.50-£47

Right, this candle isn't made from the fat of a hanged man – it's paraffin (snore) – nor does it invoke the dead to rise, given it runs on AA batteries rather than incantations. It's just a kinda nice *Hocus Pocus* throwback. tinyurl.com/black-flame



HEXVESSEL T-SHIRT

£20

Some may be sworn to the dark, but Finland's wyrd occult folk rockers Hexvessel are sworn to the green. Sacrifice a £20 note to both them and the legendary astronomer and presenter of the 80s *Cosmos* TV series, Carl Sagan! tinyurl.com/praise-sagan



BRUTUS T-SHIRT

£22

Belgium is famous for its chocolate and, er, Flanders Fields? Brutus, a post-hardcore three-piece from the Flemish region, are more delicious/poignant than both. Rep their new *Unison Life* LP, with this fine t-shirt. tinyurl.com/brutus-tee



KILLSTAR TAROT CARDS

£19.99

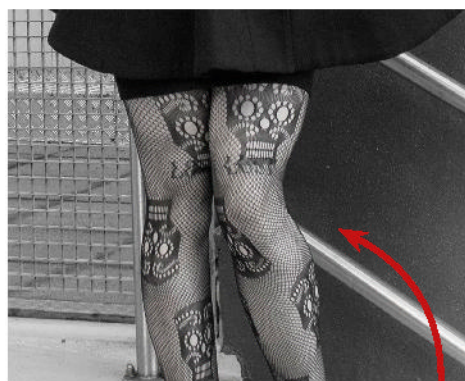
Ah, yes, we see something in your future... a necessary and worthy expenditure on... holographic tarot cards?! We also see... displeasure, as your elderly relatives are constantly dealt the 'Death' card. tinyurl.com/dark-tarot



PARKWAY DRIVE BUNDLE

£43.50

Celebrate the new studio album from these Aussie metalcore stalwarts with this limited-edition bundle. Alongside the CD you get a flag, patch, pin and dead cute tanktop, as well as a handy embossed storage tin. tinyurl.com/parkway-bundle



SUGAR SKULL TIGHTS

£11.99

Give your pins some pop and get ready for the goth club dancefloor, and possibly the afterlife, with these majestic, Day Of The Dead-inspired, skull-emblazoned fishnets. Thanks to designer Pamela Mann, hosiery never looked quite so sinister. tinyurl.com/sugar-skull



HAIL SATAN VARSITY JACKET

£35.95

Seeking higher education in the lower realms? Jonesing for a smart, preppy jacket that also proclaims your undying devotion to the horned one? If so, this devilish letterman jacket will see you right. It's nice and light, too – perfect for the scalding fires of Hell. tinyurl.com/varsity-satan



PLEASE RETURN MY STAMPS

£23.50

Michael Hvolgard Andersen's new A4-sized, hardback book on the early, 1991-94 death metal scene is also a highly personal account, seen through the lens of tape trading and his own fanzine, *Emanzipation*, with a host of unseen pics. tinyurl.com/death-stamps

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LAMB OF GOD

DO YOU SEE THE OMENS?

Lamb Of God do, and they're not good. But despite living in a world of hate and unrest, Randy Blythe hasn't let it stop him from trying to make a difference

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN



LAMB OF GOD

Lamb Of God (left to right): Art Cruz, Mark Morton, Randy Blythe, Willie Adler, John Campbell





Randy Blythe always knew the world was going to end. Born in 1971, he was too young to remember much about the Vietnam War, but acutely felt the scars it left on his country's psyche, with a brew of paranoia and hostility constantly threatening to boil over into total nuclear annihilation.

"Even as a young child, I had the knowledge – in fact, the *certainty* – that one day I was going to die in a fiery nuclear explosion," he says today. "The Russians – these people I didn't even know – were going to bomb us, because that's what the media was saying. Luckily, with the fall of the Soviet Union, that whole angst between these two superpowers calmed down. But the nukes never went away. At any point, we could eradicate all life on Earth. The tensions in the world feel like the Cold War firing up again. The angst is back."

That angst is present on *Omens*, Lamb Of God's ninth album. It's another savage assault that lashes out at the indignities perpetrated against us by corrupt leaders, not to mention the poor decisions we're making as a human race – '*plastic in your bloodstream, plastic in your brain*', Randy laments on *Denial Mechanism*, referring to the scientific studies that prove the material is showing up in our bodies, and even the placentas of our unborn children. If you thought Lamb Of God's songs were bleak before, this is a whole other level.

"If there's a unifying theme of *Omens*, it's to pay attention to what's happened in the past, because it's happening now," Randy says. In other words, "Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it." "Authoritarian tendencies are rising up again – especially on the far right – and we have to pay attention to that so we don't let the fucking demagogues have their way. We just don't seem to be learning – motherfuckers, pay attention!"

Despite predicting the end times, Randy remains remarkably chipper today, as we catch up before his band's headlining slot at Bloodstock festival. Frontman of Lamb Of God for almost 30 years, Randy's core trade has long been angst, outrage, and every shade of apoplexy in between. But when he's not onstage howling like a wounded beast, Randy thrums with a quiet energy that animates him in spurts – jolts of lightning that betray the ferocious physicality that's made him one of metal's most formidable frontmen. Still, we feel like we should ask him if he's OK.

"I'm personally OK," he replies. "The album is a reflection of two things: it's a reflection of the current state of the world and people's reaction to that, and it's a reflection of my mind state when processing issues. My mind state is not a static thing, and it changes. In this band, I've always written about things that concern me, and I'm not going to sit down and write a song for Lamb Of God about some perfect afternoon I had with a lady!"

Aside from being in Randy's good-humoured presence this afternoon, much of what we've learned about his mind state in recent months has come from his Instagram presence. There, he's posted about events like accompanying a fan while they donated bone marrow (thanks to LOG's awareness-raising single *The Duke*, which honoured a fan who passed away from leukaemia), and kept people up to

date on his recent project to rewild some land in Ecuador (more on that later). It all seems indicative of a man who's determined to do some good in the world, who's carving out meaning for himself where there isn't immediately a sense of it. Is that the case?

"I have no choice other than to do that," he states. "Otherwise I'd blow my fucking brains out."

If there's one word that's been annoying Randy Blythe recently, it's 'unprecedented'. Do not, under any circumstances, utter it in his presence.

"During the pandemic, I was about to pull my hair out if I heard the term 'unprecedented' on the news one more time," he says. *None* of it is unprecedented. Since the dawn of time we have had plagues, civil unrest, economic ups and downs... the only thing that is remotely unprecedented is our capability to destroy the planet, or to make it uninhabitable for human beings."

It's something that's been on Randy's mind a lot lately. He grew up learning to skate but, about a decade ago, he switched to surfing when he found himself living on the beach in a cheap rental house. Not only has it become something of a physical and mental refuge, it's allowed him to connect with new people – one of whom is Carlos Odeja, from Ecuador.

Carlos had long been distressed about deforestation in Ecuador (see *Born To Rewild* on p.42). So, when he let on to Randy at the beginning of the pandemic that there was some cattle-land for sale near his family's farm, the frontman was quick to act – he bought it, with a view to planting indigenous trees, hoping to make the money back from touring. When Covid put an end to that idea, he instead turned to Cameo, the service that allows fans to pay for video messages from their favourite celebrities. While initially reluctant, he realised he could use his platform as Randy From Lamb Of God to do some good.

"Cameo had been asking me for a while to do one, but punk rock guilt kept me from doing it," he explains. "I realise I'm in a band and to a degree famous or whatever, but I didn't want to charge people for videos of me. But then I realised I could take the money and put it towards this environmental project."

"I WAS CERTAIN I WOULD DIE IN A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION"

RANDY BLYTHE

He's done Happy Birthday messages, along with more "intense" ones for those who have terminal cancer.

"People's friends and family have reached out afterwards saying, 'That message meant so much to them,'" he says. "It's been an interesting thing. I'm not allergic to making money, because my friend [Guns N' Roses bassist] Duff McKagan told me that, 'It's not the money you make, but what you do with it that matters.' I'm not saying I'm 100% altruistic – I'm not Gandhi or anything – but I try to do some good at least."

One of the other causes Randy was vocal about during the pandemic period related to the West Memphis Three – three men who were wrongly convicted as teenagers, in 1994, of the murders of three boys in West Memphis. One of the men, Damien Echols, was put on death row. They were released in 2011 after signing an Alford plea, which allowed ▶

them to maintain their innocence while pleading guilty. In June, Randy travelled to Arkansas to support Damien as he petitioned the court for new DNA testing of evidence, in the hope it could potentially identify the killer(s) and bring justice to the case (though the request was denied).

"I felt strongly about the Damien Echols situation long before I ever got locked up, because I thought that could have been me," Randy explains. "At Bloodstock, you have the Sophie Lancaster Stage – that could have been me. I was that weird fucking kid, and that weird kid got killed for nothing. That [other] weird kid went to death row for years. Beyond the fact Damien is my friend, but generally now because I'm sober 11 years now, whenever I see things that are just so blatantly wrong, I want to do something."

That period of being "locked up" came in 2012 in the Czech Republic, when he was accused of pushing fan Daniel Nosek off the stage during a show in the country, leading to fatal injuries. Randy stood trial for manslaughter and was acquitted. During the ordeal, he presented himself sincerely, saying in a statement: "I am a man. I was raised to face my problems head on, not run from them like a petulant child."

Documented further in his book, *Dark Days*, it was an undeniably traumatic time for everyone involved. In July of this year, Lamb Of God played at Inkarceration festival, which takes place at the now-disused Ohio State Reformatory. The facility admitted its first inmates in 1896 and remained in operation until 1990, and *The Shawshank Redemption* was

"NOBODY NEEDS TO SEE 70-YEAR-OLD RANDY JUMPING AROUND!"

RANDY BLYTHE

filmed there. Randy watched the movie the night before going, and the band had a private tour. He took his camera along to document it.

"I had not been in a correctional facility since I got out of the Czech Republic, so it's not a place I was rushing to go see, you know?" he explains. "As a photographer, it was awesome, it gave me a level of emotional remove, because I'm looking through the eyes of a photographer rather than a guy who's been in a prison. But I did end up making a lot of comparisons."

"The prison I was in [Pankrác] is actually two years older than the one used for Inkarceration, and as I was walking around, it just felt utterly crazy that the place could have stayed open until 1990," he continues. "Utterly inhumane conditions there, but it wasn't intended to be a prison – it was a reformatory type place where they had a very low rate of recidivism [reoffending]. Before the Depression, they'd been teaching people a trade, shoring them up morally and showing them there were other viewpoints, but once that hit, people were turning to crime to eat and it became a nightmarish place. To quote ourselves, there were still echoes."

It's easy to wonder if, 10 years on from his arrest, Randy's experiences still weigh on his mind. It's also perhaps too flippant a question, given the complexities of the situation – something that he politely but firmly acknowledges.

"That's a question that you and a bunch of other fuckin' journalists ask! Ha ha! It's not the anniversary of a record I'm celebrating or whatever – it's just something that happened,"

Randy attempts to leave the photoshoot early when he hears his surfboard calling...





LAMB OF GOD

Lamb Of God: pissed-off groove machines



BORN TO REWILD

Randy Blythe's surfer buddy, Carlos Odeja, explains how their rewilding project is helping Ecuador's environment



WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IS ECUADOR FACING IN 2022?

"The obvious one is logging. It's a major issue due to lack of education and opportunities — people who are hoping for better lives for their families but can't find better ways of putting food on the table."

AND THIS IS SOMETHING YOU DEALT WITH DIRECTLY WHEN LIVING IN ECUADOR?

"In the region where I'm from, on the coast, it's very sad to hear stories from people who live in the area who will say, 'We heard chainsaws, so

went to speak to the people cutting down trees, and they're only being paid \$10–15 a tree.' What I've been trying to do is, go to the families that are taking on these jobs and say, 'When somebody offers you \$10 to cut down a tree, I'll offer you \$100 to not cut it.' But that's a short-term solution."

YOU AND RANDY ARE PLANTING TREES ON LAND NEAR YOUR FAMILY'S FARM. WHY?

"I'm very passionate about sustainability and have been since I was a child. This is about me trying to leave a legacy

to the world and nudging others to do the same. My philosophy is, we don't need to stop doing things that we love, but let's start thinking about sustainability in whatever you do in your everyday life."

WHAT DOES RANDY'S INVOLVEMENT MEAN TO YOU?

"Randy is like a brother to me. Someone who has seen it's possible to use his platform to reach people in other ways. Lamb Of God play all over the world, but Randy's involvement



in projects like this helps to mitigate his carbon footprint, and he is also able to mobilise people to get behind these issues. He helps prove that no matter who you are and what you do, it should be the environment that drives us as a society."

he says. "If anyone wants answers on how I feel about that... I wrote a 500-page book. That details it pretty well!"

Randy Blythe has a dream. Standing on a beach, the sounds of surf filling the air and the sun beaming on his face, a long-haired kid in a black t-shirt will approach him. "Aren't you Randy from Lamb Of God?" he'll ask. "Not anymore," he'll reply, with a serene smile.

We're paraphrasing, but the scenario is one he fondly shares in *Dark Days*, painting a picture of a man who's ready to retire from his band, content to ride out into the sunset. At the age of 51, we wonder how close Randy is to that day.

"I haven't seen that exit ramp yet," Randy says, smiling like he's just figured out the punchline to a killer joke.

"That's very specific to Lamb Of God, too – not to music in general, as I plan on making music for as long as I possibly can. But nobody needs to see 70-year-old Randy Blythe jumping around and yelling, 'This is a motherfucking invitation.' I don't think my body would be able to do that!"

But what about Ozzy Osbourne? He's 73 and has just been onstage playing *Paranoid* at Birmingham's Commonwealth Games closing ceremony...

"But Ozzy doesn't do what I do! Ha ha ha! I love Ozzy to death, but because I'm such a physical performer, that's what it is for me. Total physical immersion in our music. Sometimes I go onstage and think, 'I'm gonna take it easy tonight, I'm not gonna jump off shit, I'm not gonna run around as much,' and then I'll do it anyway. I don't know how long I'll be able to do that. I know for a fact that, unless something horrible happens, if we make it to 2025, that'll be 30 years of the band. I gotta make it to 30 years, and I think my body can take that."

Though he's fronted Lamb Of God for almost three decades, Randy will be the first to tell you that being a lead singer isn't the sum of his identity. When the world shut down and his band were unable to tour, Randy, unlike some musicians, didn't panic.

"I WAS TEARGASSED AND SHOT AT WITH RUBBER BULLETS"

RANDY BLYTHE

"What kept me going was knowing that [the lockdown situation] wasn't that bad, because I have previous experience which is much, much worse! Ha ha!" he explains. "When you've been locked up in a foreign country, being locked up at home was, like, 'This isn't so bad – I'm at home, I have a computer, instruments... I can go out for a walk at night by myself, I can eat what I want...'"

He got really into historical drama *The Crown* and became "obsessed" with the royal family, yelling at the TV and talking to himself with his British alter ego, 'Roger Brilliant' (Roger will later make a brief appearance during the evening's Bloodstock set). During the rest of his spare time, he simply pivoted to one of his other passions: photography.

"I was on the streets all summer of 2020 [during the Black Lives Matter protests], getting teargassed and shot at with rubber bullets," he says. "A good photograph can change the course of history. It's my way of interfacing and making sense of the world – looking at photographs later, it helps me to realise why I chose to look at a certain subject or follow it in a certain way. It's as much a document of my mental state as it is a document of what you can see."

He's also been steadily working on two books. The first is a long-term project he calls 'Frontman,' which, as its title suggests, is a depiction of other people that do his job. Today at Bloodstock, he'll take a portrait of iconic Killing Joke man Jaz Coleman. The second – and more immediate – is a sort-of sequel to *Dark Days*.

"The last book was about personal accountability," he explains. "The vehicle to that was the story about me getting arrested and going to trial. This book is about perspective – the core theme is perspective and changing it to a healthy one. In recent years, I've been listening to other people's perspectives rather than just trying to figure out everything myself, because I'm not going to! The book is a collection of stories about different experiences I've had with people and what I've taken away from those experiences."

One-to-one conversations are increasingly important to Randy. When we last spoke to him, ahead of the release of 2020's self-titled album, he made no secret of the fact he hates the two-party political system in the US – that the Democrats and Republicans are like opposing sports teams – and today he sees change as something that can only happen on a more local level.

"I've given up on there being mass social change one way or another; the only change comes with individual conversations," he says today. "I can talk to anyone, as long as they aren't a frothing lunatic. We can find some way to meet in the middle and find some semblance of sanity. But if you put people in these boxes like, 'You are a Republican and you are a Democrat', or 'You are a Nazi right-winger and you are a whiny, whiny liberal libtard', then you just dehumanise people. They become part of a group identity and groupthink sets in. That's not how progress is made."

"The best I can do is try to do the right thing in my own life, try not to let my prejudices seep into my own interactions with other people. It would behoove us all to act better towards each other. I sound like a total fucking hippy..."

Randy's good humour seldom slips in conversation, even when difficult subjects are broached. Every answer is thoughtfully considered. He might scream about everything being doomed to fail, but it hasn't stopped him from exploring many interests, or from trying to effect change. Ask bandmate/guitarist Mark Morton what changes he's seen in Randy in the past decade, and he'll simply say, affectionately, "He's just grown, as people are supposed to. The amount of passion he has for others, and the care he takes in the things he does, they show that he's a wonderful human being. That's what happens when you do things right – you grow and get better."

With LOG, Randy's ambitions are to play Vietnam (to learn about its history – and great food), go back to Africa, and do a gig on Antarctica ("Metallica are the only band that have done that – damn you, Lars Ulrich!"), which would mean the band had played on every continent. But personally? He doesn't want anything from the world.

"As [Roman Emperor] Marcus Aurelius said – and I'm paraphrasing here – 'The only reward for our efforts in life are charitable deeds and unstained character.' That's all I can hope to get as a reward. Trying to make things somewhat better, and not make too much of a mess of my character. As far as my personal wants? I just want to go surfing, dude! I want to go chill out! I want to hang out with my friends, write books. I don't need anything else."

And with that, we bid farewell to Randy Blythe, and good 'ol Roger Brilliant, and cross our fingers they'll be blowing out 30 candles on a birthday cake in 2025. **M**

**OMENS IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST.
LAMB OF GOD TOUR THE UK IN DECEMBER**

THE NEW WAVE OF AMERICAN HEAVY METAL: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Lamb Of God rose from the NWOAHM scene to become global metal superstars – but not all of their peers were so lucky. Twenty years on, this is what happened to the rest of American metal's class of 2002

WORDS: MATT MILLS

UNEARTH

Formed in 1998 and still going strong, Boston metalcore ragers Unearth have outlasted the NWOAHM scene. 2004's *The Oncoming Storm* and 2006's *III: In The Eyes Of Fire* remain cornerstones of the movement.

Trevor Phipps (vocals): "After nu metal, people were eager to find something not as commercially driven and more real. There was no real production value, just a lot more basement shows. So the NWOAHM happened organically.

"We were brother bands with Every Time I Die. We shared a bus with them four or five times. There was one time on Ozzfest where our bus had to leave but there were a few cars blocking us, and Andy Williams [ETID's guitarist, who moonlights as AEW wrestler The Butcher] started to pick the cars up! Those guys were a ton of fun.



"In 2007, we took out Darkest Hour, August Burns Red and, as the first band of four, Suicide Silence. I noticed on that tour just how well Suicide Silence were doing. I think the scene's always looking for the next thing.

"Next year, we'll have a new record out. We just approved the final mix and master, and it's vicious! We're offering a lot more dynamic tracks – I pushed myself vocally and Buz [McGrath, lead guitar] pushed himself out of his comfort zone – because we had more time to write it over the pandemic."



ALL THAT REMAINS

Formed by outspoken ex-Marine Phil Labonte, Springfield, MA's All That Remains have released eight albums since 2002's debut *Behind Silence And Solitude*.

Phil Labonte (vocals): "The first time I saw Shadows Fall, I was like, 'That band's onto something!' They were taking that European metal sound I was always interested in and making it American. It was inspired by At The Gates and Soilwork and making waves in western Massachusetts! But, in All That Remains, we knew that metalcore was a trend: we were trying to buck it as soon as we got wind of that. After we released *The Fall Of Ideals* [in 2006], we focused on writing choruses, not breakdowns or solos.

"Being openly libertarian is important to me because liberty is important. It's important to have liberal principles like due process and the freedom of speech, and those things aren't in vogue anymore.

"All That Remains haven't put out a record since Oli [Herbert, lead guitar] passed away. I don't know if I can articulate what that does to a band. It made us appreciate that life is short and that you never know what'll happen. It was a shock that made us think about our own mortality. But we've got a very competent group of people that are writing now, and we have some really cool ideas."



CHIMAIRA

Were the Cleveland crew really the band who coined the phrase 'New Wave Of American Heavy Metal'? Yes they were, according to their former frontman, Mark Hunter.

Chimaira printed 'New Wave Of American Heavy Metal' on t-shirts in 2001. Was there really a movement or was it a buzz term?

Mark Hunter (vocals): "It was just a marketing trick. When I bought CDs back in the day, a lot of albums had a tag that said New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, and I thought it was really cool. I had never seen anyone promote themselves that way over here.

"We were working on [Chimaira's second album] *The Impossibility Of Reason* at the time and transitioning from the 'nu metal' of *Pass Out Of Existence*. We loved Morbid Angel, Deicide and Suffocation, so being labelled 'nu metal' stung a little bit. The marketing around *The Impossibility Of Reason* became about being metal and this whole new feeling of it. Coincidentally, a lot of our peers were doing the same thing: they were starting a new feeling, a new movement, themselves."

Was there camaraderie between bands, or were you rivals?

"Both. When I speak with [Lamb Of God guitarist] Mark Morton, we reminisce on how much we wanted to completely annihilate each other. It drove us to perform better.

"Slipknot were the most fun I ever had with another band. Clown [percussionist Shawn Crahan] had an aversion to clocks. I was standing side-stage and saw him charging towards me with a fucking bat. I thought, 'What's happening here?!', then BAM! He hit the clock next to me with his bat. Now that I've been retired [from music] for a little bit, I can look at it all from a bird's eye view."

When did you realise Chimaira had to break up?

"Early in 2014. I had to cancel a European tour due to pneumonia. I took away everyone's income for six weeks because I was sick. Then we had

"WE WANTED TO ANNIHILATE LAMB OF GOD"

MARK HUNTER

another tour planned and you could see it wasn't going to be very lucrative. The profit was \$1,200 a dude for six weeks of work.

"These days I'm a website creator and professional photographer. I can sleep in my own bed and make good money, but still be creative."

You successfully underwent treatment for papillary cancer in 2019. How did that affect you?

"During a routine physical, my doctor noticed a lump on my thyroid. When I heard the word cancer, in my mind, I'm dead. I immediately collapsed to my knees – cry and vomit. A day later, I shared it with my fans. I got a message from a girl who had it at seven years old and again at 11. It flipped my perspective. It became, 'Let's cut this shit out and move on.'"

Chimaira reunited for one show in 2017. Any plans for another?

"We had some offers in the summer to play festivals but if we were to come back, we'd do it on our own terms. Unfortunately there's nothing driving anyone to push the band back into high gear, largely because a couple of us have careers we can't just walk away from."

GOD FORBID

New Jersey's God Forbid were charter members of the NWOAHM with albums such as *Determination* (2001) and *Gone Forever* (2004). They split in 2013 following the departure of guitarist Doc Coyle but reunited this year.

Doc Coyle (guitar): "New Jersey was an eclectic scene. The first show I ever went to, Candiria headlined: they combined hardcore, jazz and hip hop. God Forbid came out of that scene a pure metal band and really stood out.

"Our first tour in 2000 was with Shadows Fall. Their album *Of One Blood* came out a year before our album *Determination*, and we always felt like we were playing catch-up. We headlined with Bleeding Through and Avenged Sevenfold and it didn't do that well: 100 people per night. We went home broke, doing shitty jobs and bummed out.

"Our last tour, in 2012, was with Shadows Fall too. When it finished, I was homeless. I quit the band and moved to Los Angeles and John

[Boecklin] from DevilDriver showed me some Bad Wolves material with Tommy Vext singing. I thought it was something special.

"I did a podcast [in 2019] and said I didn't think anyone gave a shit about

God Forbid reuniting. That went viral. We started talking and texting more. Our reunion show [at Blue Ridge Rock Festival in September 2022] was nerve-wracking, but the energy was absolutely incredible."



BLEEDING THROUGH

Orange County's Bleeding Through mixed hardcore with black metal and keyboards on standout albums *This Is Love*, *This Is Murderous* (2003) and *The Truth* (2006). They split in 2014 before reuniting in 2018.

Brandon Schieppati (vocals): "In Bleeding Through, we always kept our goals reasonable. So when we got thrown onto Ozzfest [in 2004], it was like *Lord Of The Flies* – these kids trying to figure life out. On that tour, Randy Blythe from Lamb Of God started a new crew called the Shirts Off Crew! We were a bunch of drunk fucking bands wreaking havoc, and Sharon Osbourne sent an email: 'This has to stop! The grounds are complaining about you flipping trash cans over!'

"Bleeding Through needed a break because our lives beyond the band had to matter. I started working out on tour because I'm bipolar and downtime is bad for me. I had this opportunity to open my own gym. I've had Rise Above Fitness for more than 10 years. Avenged Sevenfold used to come here!

"We missed the band so much that we reunited. We call ourselves 'vacationcore': whenever we can get away and go on vacation on the band's expense, we do it!"





SHADOWS FALL ★

Boston bruisers Shadows Fall released seven albums and bagged two Grammy nominations before going on hiatus in 2015. They reunited in 2021 for a comeback show.

Brian Fair (vocals): “In Massachusetts, the NWOAHM had its own little scene within a scene. At the time, nu metal was king. And we didn’t have DJs; we used loads of guitar solos and had loads of hair. We wanted to scare the nu metal out of people.

“Our first Grammy nomination was a shock. We knew we made waves by selling 100,000 records on

Century Media, but that was another stratosphere. We knew we wouldn’t win. But after walking the red carpet, the E! network nominated me for both their Best and Worst Hair awards. Ha ha ha!

“After we signed to Atlantic [for 2007’s *Thread Of Life*], our lead guitarist, Jon Donais, thought we were gonna

“I WATCHED MY FIRST KID CRAWL ON AN APP”

BRIAN FAIR

be fucking Metallica: ‘Major label! I’m gonna be rich!’ But when we went on hiatus, we had been touring for 17 years. I’d had my first kid; Paul [Romanko, bass] had a kid. I remember watching my daughter crawl on an app – I was in Bulgaria. It was just time to come home, then Jon got the offer to join Anthrax. A friend of mine worked at an instrument company and someone there retired, so I got a job there.

“What got us back together is that we never stopped enjoying shows. We just needed time away to appreciate what we’d created. We didn’t think about what would happen after our reunion show [in December 2021], but the idea of new music has been floating around. If it feels like Shadows Fall material, we may pursue it.” **H**

METALLICA

WASTING YOUR



HATE



GETTY/NIELS VAN IPEREN

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS

The haircuts, the eyeliner, the bluesy riffs – the mid-90s was the point where it wobbled for metal's biggest band. But 25 years after *Reload*'s release, Metallica's most controversial period is ready for re-evaluation ►



arl's Court, London, October 12, 1996. Metallica are playing *Enter Sandman* to 20,000 baying fans when things start to go spectacularly wrong with their enormous stage set. A roadie high in the lighting rig gets electrocuted and falls from the gantry on the end of a rope. Another catches a flare and goes up in flames, running across the stage as he burns.

Suddenly, the entire stage set begins to collapse around the band, and they're hastily ushered off to safety. A few minutes later, they come back on and begin playing *Am I Evil?* through small amps, huddled close together amid the wreckage and lit by bare light bulbs. It's a headfuck for everyone watching.

It takes a few minutes for it to become clear what is happening. This is a stunt, one that will close every show on the 125-date Poor Touring Me jaunt. With the internet still in its infancy, word of this epic prank hasn't spread. It's a masterclass in punking an entire audience.

Ironically, that's what some say Metallica did with that year's *Load* album and its follow-up, *Reload*, released 18 months later. Those two records were a world away from their old thrash metal sound and even more mainstream than the world-beating *The Black Album*, baffling and enraging a large chunk of their fanbase at the time – a state of affairs compounded by the band's new short-hair-and-eyeliner image. Twenty-five years after the release of *Reload*, that era remains the most contentious period of Metallica's career.

"One of the most admirable things about the band is they really don't think in terms of people's reactions," says producer Bob Rock, who worked on *Load* and *Reload*, as well as *The Black Album* and 2003's *St. Anger*. "They just do what they feel is right for them. They don't take into account what people think. When they go in a direction and they make a commitment to doing something, they just do it. And they don't hold back."

During the 80s and early 90s, Metallica's ambitions were matched step for step by their success. They swiftly outpaced the thrash metal scene they'd spawned, making the leap from cult underground band to mainstream metal powerhouse. *The Black Album*'s 10-million-plus sales had put them in music's top tier alongside the likes of Guns N' Roses and U2.

"They worked really hard and concentrated on becoming the biggest band in the world, and after *The Black Album*, they were," Bob Rock says. "And after you get that, it's just a different ballgame. I think they felt a certain amount of wanting to stretch out."

Metallica had barely put a foot wrong over the previous decade, and by the time they wrapped up the massive tour in support of *The Black Album*, they seemed to be invincible. But even they weren't oblivious to the musical sea change happening around them. The rise of grunge had precipitated an identity crisis in countless established metal bands, while the genre itself was on the back foot, viewed as a spent force or even an embarrassment in some quarters.

"I think they just saw that culture was changing," says Bob Rock of Metallica's mindset at the time. "And the rules of metal are very confining. The drum sound has to be a certain way, the guitar sound has to be a certain way, you can't do harmonies. I mean, that's just no fun."

There's no denying that, but in the run-up to *Load* Metallica seemed to be split between the traditionalist camp of frontman James Hetfield and bassist Jason Newsted on the one hand, and the more adventurous, experimental leanings



So, James, was *Load* a "Yeaah-ehh!" or a "Nooo-oo"?



Industry darlings: James, Kirk, Lars and Jason, Billboard's Rock and Roll Artist of the Year in 1997

"THE RULES OF METAL ARE VERY CONFINING. THAT'S JUST NO FUN"

LOAD AND RELOAD PRODUCER BOB ROCK

of guitarist Kirk Hammett and drummer Lars Ulrich on the other. Kirk was hanging out with his artistic friends in San Francisco, earning himself the in-band nickname 'Kwirk' in the process. "Those guys see me as quirky and unpredictable, because I am more willing to try a lot of things they are a bit hesitant to experiment with," the guitarist told *Metal Hammer* at the time.

Partner-in-crime Lars, meanwhile, made no secret of his love of Oasis, then the most-talked about band on the planet. "I loved their arrogance, confidence and how every other word would be 'cunt' or 'fuck,'" Lars told the *NME*. Such was the drummer's fandom, that he even worked as the Mancunian group's impromptu lighting engineer at one Oasis show in New Jersey.

A law unto themselves:
Metallica in August 1996



LOAD RELOADED

We made the perfect 10-track album from *Load* and *Reload*

FUEL

The ultimate pedal-to-the-metal gearhead anthem hollered out with unabashed relish by James. A textbook Metallica album opener.

UNTIL IT SLEEPS

The bridge between *The Black Album* and the *Load/Reload* era — a concrete-encased gothic metal anthem with despair in its soul.

BLEEDING ME

An ebbing, flowing journey through James's psyche. Its monolithic central riff is edged with psychedelia. Massive chorus, too.

KING NOTHING

Relentless riff, snarling vocals and a killer hook: Metallica may have slowed down, but this song shows they had lost none of their power.

THE MEMORY REMAINS

Marianne Faithfull adds wordless yet world-weary vocals to this tale of what happens when Hollywood glamour fades.

THE UNFORGIVEN II

The Black Album's stately ballad got an equally stirring sequel on *Reload*, with weeping, country-style guitars adding an unexpected dimension.

FIXXXER

Reload's forgotten closer and a lost Metallica treasure: a harrowing tale of child abuse set to a musically and emotionally crushing soundtrack.

HERO OF THE DAY

James mines family trauma for this *Load* highlight. *Hero Of The Day* is the closest Metallica have ever come to writing a 'pop' song.

LOW MAN'S LYRIC

Low Man's Lyric is a Metallica ballad like no other — woozy, deceptively stirring and powered by, of all things, a hurdy gurdy.

THE OUTLAW TORN

Load's exhilarating, near-10-minute finale: a masterclass in escalating dynamics. Arguably the greatest Metallica album closer.



Metallica in the round in December 1996, surrounded by friends and family

While the songs that eventually made up *Load* and *Reload* didn't bear the obvious influence of Noel Gallagher, they did draw from a broader range of influences than ever before: blues rock, Southern rock, country music, biker bar boogie. It showed off a willingness to try something different, even if Bob Rock insists the band didn't enter the studio with any preconceived ideas in mind.

"There was no conceptual decision that they would go somewhere different," says the producer. He adds that the most significant change during the sessions that took place throughout the second half of 1995 was that the four musicians worked together in the same room for the first time. "It freed them up from concentrating on what made them who they are. They realised that they could stretch the boundaries and that's what *Load* and *Reload* was."

Load was released on June 4, 1996, preceded by the single *Until It Sleeps* (which gave them their very first Top 10 song in the US). *Reload*, consisting of songs written at the same time as its predecessor that the band simply didn't have time to record, followed in November 1997. The reception to both was mixed. Some recognised Metallica's desire to try something different, but many viewed the two records as an unwanted and unnecessary drift towards metal's middle ground.

Musically, *Load* and *Reload* had plenty of high points across their 27 tracks. *Until It Sleeps* was one of James's most personal songs, addressing his mother's battle with cancer,



A far cry from their early thrash image: The Four Horsemen at the MTV Europe Music Awards in London, November 1996

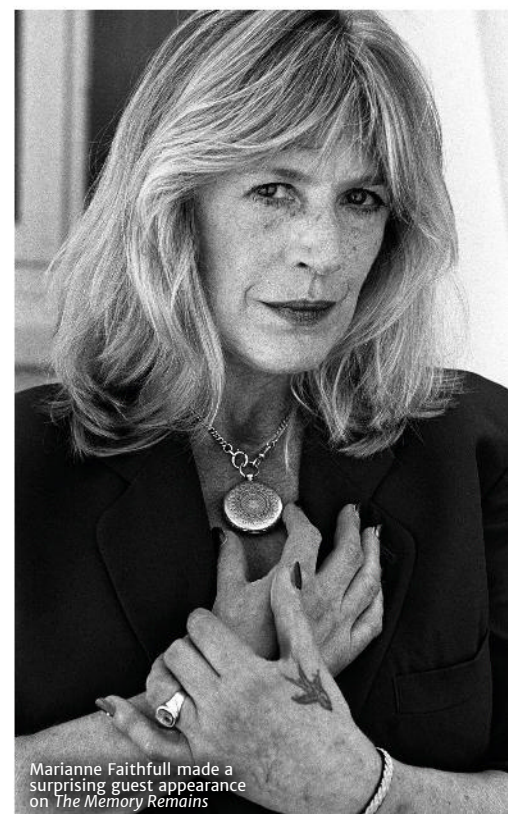
and *Reload*'s gleefully mutton-headed opener *Fuel* remains a live staple to this day.

Elsewhere, there were some fascinating departures. *The Memory Remains* has a wonderful gothic twist to it, thanks largely to an inspired guest appearance by 60s singer-turned-art rock doyenne Marianne Faithfull. *Mama Said* highlighted James Hetfield's love of country music, and *Low Man's Lyric* is a warped-at-the-edges ballad of the sort they've never attempted before or since. Conversely, there was plenty of mid-paced filler amid the 27 tracks that made up the two albums. The stodgy, forgettable likes of *Slither*, *Cure* and *Thorn Within* marked a slip in quality control that wasn't present on previous Metallica albums.

The perception that the band had sold out wasn't helped by the radical image change they unveiled around the release of *Load*. The four bandmembers appeared in promotional photos sporting short hair, eyeliner and, in the case of Lars Ulrich, a fur coat – heresy in the world of 90s metal.



Another one for the cabinet: Metallica backstage at the MTV Video Music Awards in New York City, September 1996



Marianne Faithfull made a surprising guest appearance on *The Memory Remains*

“THEY SAW CULTURE WAS CHANGING”

BOB ROCK

The aesthetic overhaul extended beyond haircuts and wardrobes. The self-consciously highbrow covers for *Load* and *Reload* were provided by US artist Andres Serrano, based on his controversial artworks *Blood And Semen* and *Piss Christ* (the latter featuring a crucifix suspended in a tank of urine). Even their own iconic spiky logo had been ‘de-metalled’.

“We were a heavy metal band seven or eight years ago,” Kirk told *Metal Hammer* in 1997. “I think we started our separation some time around *The Black Album*.”

It was quite an admission for a group with the word ‘metal’ in their name – one that hinted at an existential crisis in the ranks. Metallica themselves were, of course, bullish in their dismissal of criticism.

“If people think we’re a heavy metal band, a Satanic thrash band from Norway or guys that wanna hang around and do all of Oasis’s drugs, I can’t find the energy to defend that,” Lars told *Metal Hammer*. “I don’t really care.”

While *Load* and *Reload* were never going to match *The Black Album* in terms of sales, their commercial performance was far from disastrous, even if their sales figures (five million and three million in the US respectively) suggested the albums had undeniably lost Metallica a swathe of their following.

Tellingly, their first tour in support of *Load* saw them headlining alt rock travelling circus Lollapalooza (ironically, the festival’s organisers were criticised for booking a ‘metal’ band as headliners). However, the subsequent Poor Touring Me tour, with its collapsing stage set, played directly to their own fanbase, its success serving as a fuck-you to their critics.

Metallica themselves have been critical of *Load* and *Reload* in subsequent years. Lars admitted that the world could probably have done “with 12 or 15 less” songs, and Kirk – one of the two chief co-conspirators in the band’s mid-90s shift – put *Load* last and *Reload* third from last when ranking their albums in order of quality. Unsurprisingly, James saw the period around *Load* and *Reload* as a misstep in their career.

“As far as doing something that doesn’t feel right, I’m sure there’s been a few times that it’s happened – the *Load* and *Reload* era, for me, was one of those,” the singer told *Clash* magazine. “I wasn’t 100% on with it, but I would say that that was a compromise. I said, ‘I’m going with Lars and Kirk’s vision on this. You guys are extremely passionate about this, so I’ll jump on board.’”

While Metallica’s two mid-90s albums are far from perfect, that period stands up far better than its detractors would have it. Trivium frontman Matt Heafy is one of the biggest cheerleaders for *Load* and *Reload*. “Anybody who was ever a naysayer of those records back then should re-listen to them now,” he told Loudwire. “The tones of those two records and the tone of [1998 covers album] *Garage Inc.* – those are some of the best recorded metal albums ever.”

Still, *Load* and *Reload* were a watershed for Metallica. It showed that the world’s biggest metal band weren’t infallible. They continued to stretch the boundaries with bold creative decisions, some of which paid off (teaming up with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra for the original *S&M* shows), some of which put the controversy surrounding *Load* and *Reload* in the shade (that *St. Anger* snare drum sound; their collaboration with Lou Reed on *Lulu*).

So what are we to make of *Load* and *Reload* 25 years on? The experiment may have been only partially successful, yet far from being the sound of a band selling out, those two albums ultimately reflected Metallica’s desire to move forwards, against the wishes of fans who wanted them to stay exactly the way they used to be.

For Bob Rock, it’s simple. “They wanted to grow as a band,” the producer says. “And to give them credit, they’re still around and they’re still huge.” ■

LZZY HALE



THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

LZZY HALE

She's won a Grammy, become a role model, and counts Rob Halford among her friends. Not bad for a woman who spent her childhood singing to trees in rural Pennsylvania

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: JIMMY FONTAINE



She may have grown up believing herself to be a “weirdo outsider”, but Elizabeth Mae Hale has become one of modern rock’s biggest players. After a unique upbringing in a log cabin in the woods, and then on a 20-acre farm, the artist you know as Lizzy Hale was “bitten by the music bug”, and formed Halestorm at the age of 13, with her little brother, Arejay. “From early on, I knew I wanted to sing... or be a park ranger and look after the animals. I was actually quite sad because I couldn’t figure out how to do both those things together,” she tells us.

Since then, she’s overseen Halestorm’s meteoric rise. She was 21 when they signed to Atlantic Records, became the first woman to win a Grammy in the best metal performance category, and the band have released five albums – including this year’s career-heaviest *Back From The Dead* – that have helped define rock for a generation.

Lizzy has also garnered a reputation for being outspoken, opening up about her sexuality, relationships, mental health struggles and views on organised religion. “I’m happy to talk about anything!” she tells us as we sit down together over Zoom, refusing to dodge a single question. This is her story.

What was your upbringing like?

“I was blessed to have some supportive parents, who were a little nuts, because I don’t think I would have done some of the things I have done were it not for them. They had this crazy idea to live on the Appalachian Trail in a log cabin, so from the age of nine ‘til 11, there were no neighbours, just me and my little bro and my parents packed in, with one bathroom, one living room, one kitchen, in the woods. That wasn’t going to be sustainable, so we moved to a 20-acre farm – this is all in Pennsylvania, which is a big state – and I grew up on that farm until I was 18.”

What about your first memories of music?

“When I was 10 years old and we were in the cabin in the woods, one of my favourite things to do was to wander off and sing to the trees. There was nothing else to do! Ha ha ha! I would pretend that the trees were the audience and they were clapping to me.

“Fast-forward to moving to the farm, we finally had some neighbours, and I made some friends. I ended up taking an Alice Cooper and a Dio CD to a slumber party – now, this is 1996. It was the beginning of the boyband era and Mariah Carey was popular, so that’s how I discovered that my taste was not necessarily in vogue. Those girls looked at me like I was an alien; I discovered I was weird that night. I just loved that music. I grew up on my Dad’s record collection of Deep Purple, Dio, Black Sabbath, Pink Floyd, Blue Oyster Cult... that era was so important to me.”

And you started a band pretty early, too!

“Yeah. I’d been playing piano since I was five, and my brother [Arejay, Halestorm drummer] had been playing drums since he was about eight, so we would always jam together in the living room. In the summer of 1997, we decided to play our first song out in the world. We were on our way to this little show, and my little brother was basically annoying me, going, ‘Sis, we can’t go up there as Lizzy and Arejay Hale! We need a band name!’, and I’m like, ‘Buddy, we don’t need a band name, there’s only two of us!’ He just kept harping on, and we went back and forth until he said, ‘Well, what about Halestorm? It’s a pun and we’ll spell it like we spell our names!’ And I just said ‘yes’ to shut him up, like, ‘That’ll do for today!’”

What was the show like?

“We did this performance, we were literally shaking with adrenaline afterwards and... we caught the bug! I remember being back at the kitchen table, I was 13 and he was 10, and we were going, ‘Right, where else can we play? What about that coffee house down the street? What about that youth lock-in? What about Freddy’s restaurant for free ice cream?’ That was it, the start of the band.”

There’s a long tradition of siblings in bands. Sometimes it results in a real rivalry, but sometimes it brings people closer together. What have the challenges been for you and Arejay?

“Well, we’ve always just had each other, for a long period of time – probably until we got to middle school and I got the shock of, ‘Oh, right, I can have other friends!’ We’ve always been on the same level of odd, or weird, or sticking out. Also, we’re brother-sister, not brother-brother, so we don’t have that competitive nature with each other. There’s also this thing where... I call myself a reformed introvert. I’ve had to work very hard to be the way I am, and a lot of that I’ve learned from my little bro; he was born camera-ready, I don’t think I’ve seen him nervous in his life. So, we inspire each other in different ways. I’m Dean Martin to his Jerry Lewis.

“The struggles we’ve had have only come in later years.

We had no idea this silly band we started in middle school would become this thing, and so we’ve had to learn to wear different hats. I’ll put on my bandmate hat and he knows I’m talking to him as a bandmember and not his big sister. We had to learn a balance of communication, but there’s something magical about having someone blood-related in your band.”

“I COULDN’T GO ON SUPPORTING THE CHURCH”

You also had something of a religious upbringing. How do you look back on that these days?

“I’m very glad that I grew up on that side of it; I took what I needed and left what I didn’t. There is a darker side to organised religion. I lost my interest in organised religion when I was about 13 or 14 years old. There were a lot of questions that no one could answer for me, like, ‘Why is being gay wrong? Why do you have to ostracise people for that? Why is there so much love for these people and hate for these people?’ It was so messy. Eventually I decided and sat my parents down and told them I wasn’t going to go in that direction anymore. I guess I’m agnostic now, bordering on atheist.”

Was there any event that really inspired that?

“One of the big epiphanies I had was that whenever I went to church with my family, there was this couple and I was friends with their daughter. They had been married for 12 years and the father came out as gay, and his wife was very supportive and didn’t want to get divorced. I saw the church push him out immediately, like there was no place for him and he was not allowed back, and for years they had been promoting this idea that we were a community and you could come to them with anything, but suddenly he was a pariah. I lost my friend and didn’t understand it. I couldn’t go on supporting that.”

Presumably that was happening while you were trying to come to terms with your own sexuality?

“Absolutely, my own journey – I didn’t know what to call it. In the Christian community you were told it was taboo, or wrong, or we don’t talk about it. I remember feeling the guilt about it. I remember early on there was a girl in

Lzzy Hale: ready to board
Hale Force One

second or third grade named Erin and she kissed me! It was innocent or whatever, but I remember thinking it was nice... but we could get in trouble doing it. Fast-forward to middle school and it happened again at a sleepover at one of my friend's houses, and then she was really embarrassed about it and we never talked about it again. I didn't know what to do about it, so I just tucked it in my back pocket. It wasn't until I was about 19 when I came out to Joe [Hottinger, Halestorm guitarist] and was like, 'Oh, no, this is actually a thing in my life!'"

And you came out quite publicly as well...

"Yeah, I was doing this 'ask me anything' on Twitter in about 2011, and I had just forgotten I'd never said anything publicly about it. This question came in from someone asking the best way to come out to their family, and I said, 'Well, speaking as a bisexual lady, this is kind of how I went about it.' And everyone went, 'Wait... you're bi?' So, it was totally by accident, but apparently Rob Halford did the same thing, and he and I got the chance to talk about that when we opened for them in Auckland. It was a very strange coming out for me, but I wasn't really worried about anyone finding out. If someone asked, I wasn't going to lie."

What's it like having people so interested in your personal life?

"I don't mind people asking... there are so many ways to love, and I've been very lucky to be in a relationship with Joe for 19 years this year... and he is tragically straight! Ha ha ha. We have a situation that we settled on a long time ago where he lets me do what I want, we have a lot of fun together, and he is someone that I can be my truest self with. I'm not looking for approval from anyone, I've found the right thing for me. I'd encourage anyone to find the right way to have a relationship and find a way to be happy. I think the fact that we buck the trend and do what makes us feel happy is just a beautiful thing."

The 2000s were a really important time for the visibility of women in rock. What do you remember about those years?

"We were shopping around for labels, and we used to get the same thing all the time: 'We like what you do, but this 'women in bands' thing just isn't really happening.' Then Amy Lee blew up, we got Nightwish and Paramore, and then - aha, I knew we were on the right track! I always thought it was ridiculous and... I was always going to do it anyway! I wasn't going to stop playing music! I felt vindicated. If you go up against a wall, it makes you more determined to prove those people wrong. I know a lot of these women, particularly Amy Lee, as her and I have spoken about this a lot. It just needed a couple of people to blow open that door."

You have shared the stage with many of your musical heroes. Which encounter do you look back on with the most fondness?

"Dio has been such a source of inspiration for me. On our first album cycle we got to open for Heaven & Hell in Atlantic City. No one knew who we were. It was the last night of the tour, Coheed And Cambria were opening up and couldn't make it, and we just happened to be driving through on the first leg of our tour. We got this call, and were asked to make a side step. Which... of course! Fast-forward to the end of the night. Dio walks out to our RV and says, 'Stay there, I want to come and say goodbye, but I need to sign some stuff.' So we watch him sign everything for everyone, and take every picture. He still walked back to say goodbye. I said something about him being so





Halestorm (left to right): Josh Smith, Arejay Hale, Lzzy Hale, Joe Hottinger

“ME AND ROB HALFORD TALKED ABOUT COMING OUT”

incredibly gracious, and that it was the wee hours of the morning, and if he just wanted to go and rest on his bus we would understand. Dio waved a finger and said, ‘Lzzy, it’s a moment in time. You’re never going to remember every venue you play or every person you meet, but they will remember meeting you for the rest of their lives, so make it good for every one of them!’ Yes sir, Mr Dio! So, I try and treat my fans in the same way. When Dio gives you a mission, you follow. But, now I realise that he made it good for me, because I’m never going to forget that moment! After he passed, we found out that it was the last show he ever played, which is crazy. So, I feel very grateful for that moment with him.”

You were the first woman to win a Grammy in the Best Hard Rock/Metal Performance category in 2012. That’s quite a feather in your cap!

“Oh, are you kidding me! It was hard to believe I was the first. I remember talking to the guys in the band and saying to them, ‘All of those times when we thought we were crazy for doing this, we weren’t stupid and we were right to keep doing this!’ I’m proud I stuck it out and didn’t listen to those voices that told me I was wrong, that I should lose my

bandmates, that I should go down the Britney Spears route. The advice I got from these older industry men that I didn’t follow made me who I am today. It was a band achievement, but it was also a personal achievement for me.”

You’ve been a huge advocate for mental health over the years. What inspired that?

“I started therapy in my early 30s because in middle school I had anxiety attacks and depression. I cite the band with helping them go away, but I could feel those feelings coming back. My brother and I are really leading the way in our family to say that you see a dentist for your teeth and a doctor for your body – you need to see someone for your mind. So many people get so incredibly sad or lost or just decide to leave this Earth because of problems they have. I have become very outspoken, because everyone needs to talk about it. The more we normalise it, the less of those suicides will happen.”

What else is left for you to achieve?

“You never run out of dreams. I want to see how far we can take this band. We still haven’t played Wembley Stadium, I still don’t have a private jet – I’m still waiting on Hale Force One – I have an acting bug in me, and I’d love to have a guest role in whatever project might take my fancy. I just want to keep creating music and digging deeper into that, not even as a career, just how much of the three chords and the truth I can put out into the world.” ■

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MITCH LUCKER



“HE WAS A PERFORMER, BODY AND SOUL”

He took Suicide Silence to new heights, helped define the entire deathcore genre, and inspired the next generation. Ten years on from his tragic death in a motorcycle accident, we remember Mitch Lucker

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

Suicide Silence guitarist Chris Garza was in high school in Riverside, California when he heard about Mitch Lucker. Here was this tattooed kid from a neighbouring town, a year older than Chris, who fronted a band called Dying Dreams alongside his guitarist brother Cliff. Word of this Mitch guy's talent and presence had spread, bypassing even the usually insurmountable barriers of intra-school rivalry.

"People at my school were talking about him, even then," says Chris now. "He had it right out of the gate. I'd listen to the Dying Dreams demo, and that voice – that high scream he became known for – has been ingrained in my mind ever since."

Fellow Suicide Silence guitarist Mark Heylmun has an equally vivid memory, of seeing Mitch Lucker for the first time. It was at a Suicide Silence gig at the Showcase Theatre in their hometown of Corona, California. Chris Garza had co-founded the band in 2002 and Mitch had joined the following year. That night they were bottom of a multi-band bill headlined by oos metal footsoldiers God Forbid.

"When Suicide Silence come on, I just had to stop and watch," says Mark. "Mitch had the 'it' factor – this guy was so fucking commanding. I saw him in the pit afterwards. He was walking in circles with his arms all wide. I was, like, 'Dude, that guy's fucking awesome.'"

By 2005, Mark had joined Suicide Silence himself, shortly after the release of their self-titled debut EP. The band began to carve a name out for themselves beyond the confines of Southern California's Inland Empire. Their rise was accelerated by 2007's debut album, *The Cleansing*, a key staging post in the emerging deathcore scene. It was followed by two more albums, 2009's *No Time To Bleed* and 2011's *The Black Crown*, each more accomplished and ambitious than the last. It all pointed to a blazing future for Suicide Silence and their charismatic frontman.

That future would never materialise for Mitch Lucker. On the morning of November 1, 2012, the singer died after crashing his motorbike late the previous night. He was just 28 years old. Modern metal had lost one of its brightest stars.

The influence Mitch had on deathcore with Suicide Silence could be felt even before his passing. His gut-level roars and piercing screams became the benchmark against which deathcore singers were measured, while his physical presence was unmatched: a skinny, six-foot-two blur of limbs and ink, headbanging with his arms spread as wide as an eagle.

"That guy was a performer, body and soul," says Will Ramos, singer with modern deathcore hotshots Lorna Shore, who fell in love with Suicide Silence in his mid-teens. "He wrote crazy shit, he sounded insane, his whole look was awesome. When I was growing up, I was, like, 'I want to be that guy.'"

The second track on *The Black Crown*, the final album that Mitch Lucker made with Suicide Silence, is titled *O.C.D.* Its claustrophobic lyrics paint a picture of a mind trapped by its own neuroses. *'Is this the end of my reality?'* roars Mitch. *'I'll hold my breath 'til I can't breathe.'*

Those lyrics were autobiographical. The singer had been diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder as a child. "He was a clean freak," says Mark Heylmun. "He would sit and pick at his scabs. He'd find little things to pick at on his body. Like, 'What are you even grabbing at? There's nothing on you.' He had germaphobe tendencies, too – he did not like being hugged by drunk fans."

It was Mitch's OCD that indirectly led him to becoming a singer. He found both solace and release from the condition in the albums his dad, Kip, bought for him and his older brother, Cliff: Sepultura, Deftones, Korn. When Cliff began jamming metal and hardcore songs on the guitar, he asked his 16-year-old sibling to sing along. Within a few months, the pair had formed the band that would become Dying Dreams. Mitch started hanging around The Showcase Theatre, the hub for metal and punk bands passing through their hometown of Corona, California.

It was at the Showcase that he met Chris Garza. Even looking back today, Chris isn't sure how Mitch went from being the lanky kid that Suicide Silence's original singer, Tanner Womack, invited to perform at a show with them to becoming their sole frontman. "He just kind of worked his way in," recalls Chris with a smile. "He knew before me: 'This is my band now.'"

Mitch was straight edge back then. Mark says the singer didn't have his first drink until his 21st birthday in October 2005, a few weeks after the guitarist joined the band. But Mitch was a loose cannon even before he began partying. He and his friends would club together to buy old cars for \$500 a pop, only to drive them around and deliberately trash them (in an eerie foreshadowing of what was to come, one smash-up left Mitch with a punctured lung).

"He was mad," says Chris. "Before we got signed, when we were playing to five people, we'd stay at people's houses on tour and he'd end up putting fireworks up his ass and lighting them. Most of the time, if he went out, I'd stay at home. There's no way I'm going out to throw golf balls at a freeway."

Despite his wild streak, Mitch was focused on the job in hand, which was to ensure he and his band were as good as they could possibly be. Mark remembers the first time he played with Suicide Silence. "Right before we went onstage, Mitch came up to me, gave me three hard taps on my chest, and said, 'Don't. Fuck. Up.' And we went up there and we fucking murdered it."

During sessions for *The Cleansing*, Mitch would stay behind in the studio after his bandmates had left to concentrate on perfecting his vocals. "He was really critical of the way his voice should sound," says Mark. "He knew how important that was. His ethos wasn't that something should be 100%, it should be 110%, and that carried through to everyone else in the band."

"I WANTED TO BE MITCH LUCKER"

WILL RAMOS, LORNA SHORE

That drive helped push Suicide Silence to the front of the US deathcore scene alongside the likes of Job For A Cowboy, Whitechapel and Carnifex. Each of their albums improved

on its predecessor's chart position, with *The Black Crown* peaking at No.28 in the US.

The cavalier approach to his own physical wellbeing that had once seen Mitch crashing beat-up cars for fun extended to his performance onstage. "He just threw down," says Chris. "He went so crazy onstage that he needed neck surgery and his back fixing."

He could be pretty crazy offstage too, as could the rest of Suicide Silence. There was plenty of booze and other substances. "We partied like gods," says Mark. "Me and Mitch were like partners in crime. But he was never over the top with it – he always seemed in control."

Chris Garza adds: "He was never an idiot-drunk."

That's not to say the singer wasn't prone to losing his temper. "He could get real pissed off," says Mark, who laughs as he recalls the singer once throwing a vacuum cleaner at the band's bassist, Dan Kenny, over some imagined slight on their tour bus. "The anger was the one thing I couldn't understand."

Mostly, though, Mitch was good company, even if he was more introverted offstage than his onstage persona would suggest. "He wasn't a super-outgoing, talkative guy," remembers Mark. "He was pretty shy. He hated stage banter. He didn't like having to do anything other than sing."

Mitch had become a father in 2007, when his then-girlfriend (and later wife) Jolie gave birth to their daughter, Kenadee. Parenthood only intensified his drive. "He was always talking about his daughter, about being a good dad," says Chris. "But at the same time he went harder with his music. Like, 'I'm away from my daughter right now, this band needs to fucking be the best.'"

The hard work that Mitch and Suicide Silence put in paid off. The shows were getting bigger, they were climbing up festival bills. The singer bought himself a Harley-Davidson, something that gave Chris pause for thought.

"Mitch was an above-life guy, so of course he was gonna buy a Harley," says the guitarist. "Whenever you have a friend or family member who

Mitch Lucker lived fast
and died far too young





xxxx xxCaption:xxxx xxx
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Mitch loved the band he'd
"worked his way into"

buys a bike like that, you can't help thinking that something's gonna happen."

In October 2012, Suicide Silence were gathered in their garage-cum-rehearsal space in Riverside. Something was weighing on Chris's mind. He'd had enough of being in the band and was thinking of leaving.

"I was standing outside in the backyard, and Mitch came out to talk to me," says the guitarist. "He was clear-headed enough to see something was up: 'I'm going to go out and check on Garza.' He came over, we started talking. It wasn't heavy, it was a positive conversation. He was making sure I was OK. And then I saw him walk around the corner to leave, like I'd seen him do a hundred times. I did not know that was the last time I'd speak to him."

On October 31, 2012, a week or so after that conversation, Chris was on his way back home after picking up a takeaway burrito when he got a phone call from his manager: Mitch had been in a crash.

Chris raced to UCI Medical Centre in Orange County, where Mitch had been taken after the accident. According to Jolie Lucker, her husband had been drinking that evening, and she had unsuccessfully tried to stop him going out on his Harley (Jolie later called Mitch an "amazing man"), but she also talked about his issues with alcohol, describing him as "an alcoholic"). At 8.55pm that evening, Mitch had hit a pole on Main Street in Huntington Beach, close to where the couple lived.

Surgeons tried their best to stop Mitch's internal bleeding, but it wasn't enough. Just after 6am on November 1, 2012, Mitch passed away. Chris Garza was there with Jolie, Mitch's dad Kip and Suicide Silence's manager, Jerry Clubb, when the doctors broke the news.

"One moment I'm hanging out with Mitch, laughing and being stupid kids, the next week I'm seeing him fight for his life," says Chris, the emotion audible in his voice. "And a couple of hours after that, I see him pass away in front of me."

Three days later, the rest of Suicide Silence met and decided to put together a tribute gig to honour their friend. On December 21, 2012, Ending Is The Beginning: The Mitch Lucker Memorial Show took place at the Fox Theater, Pomona. It featured an all-star line-up of vocalists that included Max Cavalera, Lamb Of God's Randy Blythe and Machine Head's Robb Flynn, alongside several of Mitch's peers, including Job For A Cowboy's Jonny Davy, Phil Bozeman of Whitechapel and Eddie Hermida of deathcore pioneers All Shall Perish.

"HE WENT SO CRAZY ONSTAGE THAT HE NEEDED SURGERY"

CHRIS GARZA, SUICIDE SILENCE

"I honestly didn't know Mitch made that much of an impact until he passed away," admits Chris. "And then we did that show. To have people fly out right before Christmas, and having all these fans come out to this massive theatre, that was fucking nuts."

Before his death, Mitch had been talking about taking singing lessons with vocal coach Melissa Cross, in an attempt to do more with his voice. Mark thinks the singer would have done more with Commissioner, the dubstep-influenced side-project the singer had put together with Disfiguring The Goddess singer-turned-electronic producer Cameron 'Big Chocolate' Argon.

"Where his head was at was pretty much: don't stop at the top," says Mark. "He was on a warpath to being the best of the best."

Suicide Silence themselves continued in the wake of Mitch's death with new singer Eddie Hermida, and their seventh album, *Remember... You Must Die*, will be released in early 2023. Chris Garza says he had no doubts about keeping the band going. "All I know is if the roles were reversed, and I was the one lying in that hospital bed and not him, I would've thought, 'Damn, Mitch, you better keep this band going by any means necessary.'"

Deathcore's in-built extremity meant that Suicide Silence never truly crossed over to a mainstream metal audience, though that doesn't diminish the influence Mitch Lucker had on those who knew him and heard him.

"Mitch and Suicide Silence symbolised deathcore, and it was sick," says Lorna Shore's Will Ramos. "Chaotic, crazy music was in, especially at that time, and they embodied it."

Chris Garza and Mark Heylmun both reel off the names of bands and musicians who say they were influenced by him: Lorna Shore; Ov Sulfur, whose vocalist Ricky Hoover makes no secret of his admiration of Mitch; Betraying The Martyrs, who wrote the song *Legends Never Die* in the Suicide Silence singer's honour. His influence isn't just musical; wrestling superstar Rhea Ripley, a Suicide Silence fan, uses Mitch's signature wide-armed stomp as part of her entrance. The deathcore scene itself is currently undergoing a renaissance, and Mitch Lucker's DNA is embedded within it.

"We're really seeing and hearing now what Mitch left after his passing," says Chris. "But no matter how good they are, Mitch was the best out of all of them, by far." ■



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THE HU ARE COMING!



They've got Metallica, Elton John and The Rock in their corner – but can Mongolian metallers The Hu break America? We join them on the road in California to find out

WORDS: JOE DALY • PICTURES: STEPHANIE CABRAL

*TRANSLATION: "THE HU ARE COMING!"



In August 22, 2022, Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson posted an Instagram video of himself methodically banging out a set of bicep curls. All in a day’s work for the wrestler turned action hero, except in this post, he’s cranking *Wolf Totem* by Mongolian folk-metal heroes The Hu. This did not go unnoticed, not least by The Hu themselves.

“You can see the hard work that he’s put into his body,” says Nyamjantsan ‘Jaya’ Galsanjamts, who performs all wind instruments in The Hu as well as being one third of the band’s vocal frontline. “When you work out at that level, you have to tap into a state of mind of total focus and power and he gets there from *Wolf Totem*. Just the fact that we’re in his workout playlist is amazing!”

The Rock isn’t only celebrity fan to emerge in the wake of the success of The Hu’s 2019’s viral hit single, *Yuve Yuve Yu*, and debut album, *The Gereg*. Their legion of supporters includes everyone from Metallica to Elton John, the latter hailing them as “the band of the year”. Lzzy Hale, Papa Roach’s Jacoby Shaddix and From Ashes To New have lined up to collaborate with them, while their recent single, *Black Thunder*, appears in the new *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* videogame. It’s been a hell of a reception for a band from a country that doesn’t have a track record of producing globally famous metal bands.

“We love how people have welcomed us and how they’re willing to listen to this new culture and this new style of music that we bring,” says tovshuur player Temuulen ‘Temka’ Naranbaatar (the tovshuur is a traditional Mongolian lute).

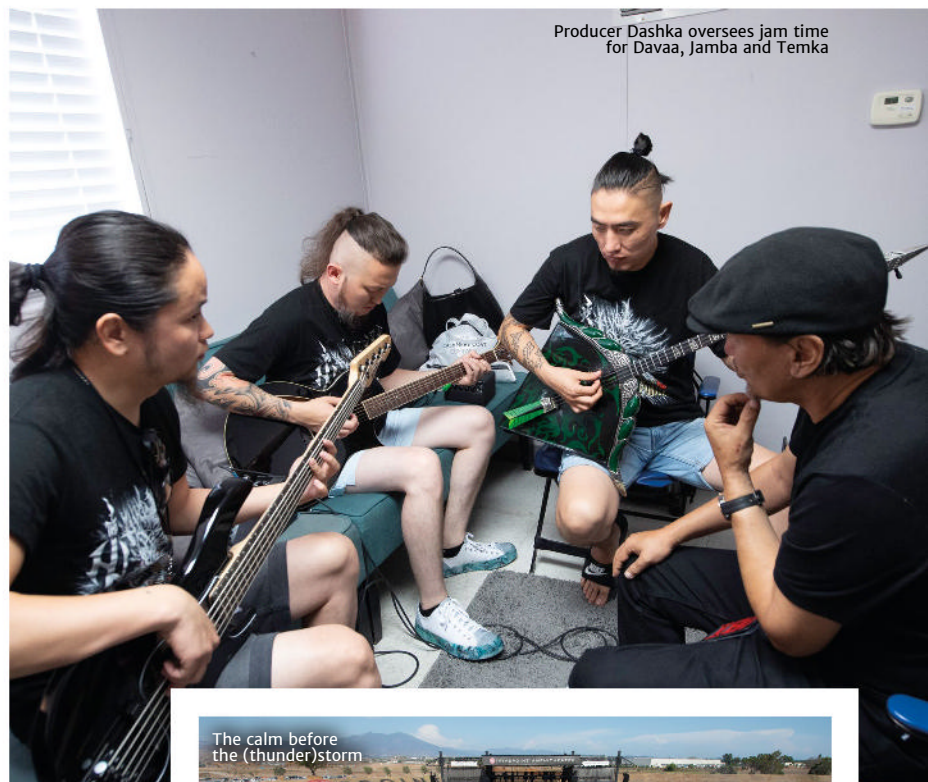
The Hu are about to find out just how receptive the USA will be to that new style of music and culture. Ahead of the release of their second album, *Rumble Of Thunder*, the band have embarked on a massive 32-date arena tour there, opening for heavyweight headliners Five Finger Death Punch and Megadeth.

They aren’t starting from scratch. *Yuve Yuve Yu* and *Wolf Totem*, the latter getting a remake with the addition of Jacoby Shaddix, made people sit up and pay attention, while they’re signed to Better Noise, the label founded by Mötley Crüe and industry heavyweight Allen Kovac, making them part of the same stable as Five Finger Death Punch and Papa Roach. But this is the biggest step up yet for Mongolia’s most talked-about musical export. The Hu are ready for America. The question is, is America ready for The Hu?

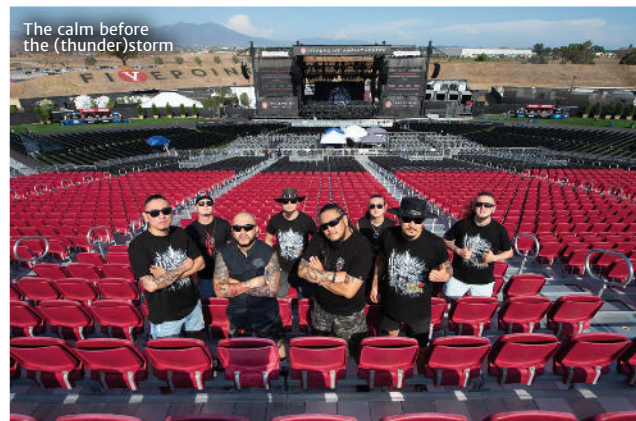
This is The Hu’s third trip to the US, though it’s the first time they’ve played enormodomes such as FivePoint Amphitheatre in Irvine, California, which is where *Hammer* meets up with them today.

The backstage compound at FivePoint is a quadrangle of maroon-painted trailers lined with tall industrial fans pumping cool air at couches set up in the middle. It’s the fourth date on this tour, and the area buzzes with pre-show activity. Dave Mustaine is chatting with somebody in the far corner, while outside The Hu’s trailer, 5FDP’s Zoltan Bathory and a sparring partner practise judo on a padded mat.

The atmosphere inside The Hu’s trailer is chill. Some of the bandmembers sit jamming in a tight semi-circle, while their producer/mentor Dashka looks on. In a small back office, Galbadrakh ‘Gala’ Tsendbaatar and Enkhsaikhan ‘Enkush’ Batjargal face each other, sawing away on their ornate, handmade upright morin khuur horsehair fiddles and throat singing together. Hanging on a clothing rack are the leathery Mongolian outfits the band wear onstage. The weather is closing in on 35°C and *Hammer* is sweating just looking at them.



Producer Dashka oversees jam time for Davaa, Jamba and Temka



The calm before the (thunder)storm



Unumunkh 'Ono' Maralkhuu, hard at work...



...and bunking off



Hu-vering up new fans

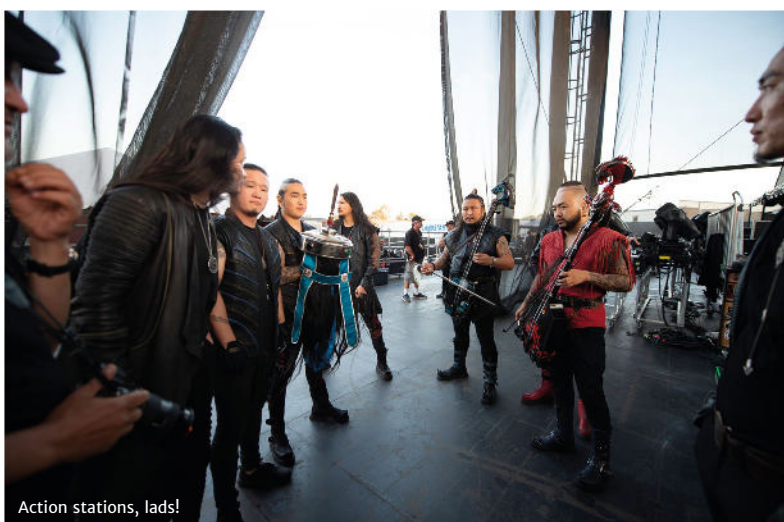
“WE HAVE TO PROVE OURSELVES EVERY SINGLE NIGHT ON THIS TOUR”

JAYA

The Hu number eight members these days, the original quartet of Gala, Enkush, Jaya and Temka augmented by percussionist Ono, guitarist Jamba, bassist Davaa and drummer Odko. The latter four are regarded as full members as opposed to touring members, as their roles continue to expand within the band. In the cramped trailer, a wordless choreography plays out as the musicians step nimbly around each other, somehow without knocking into each other's instruments or elbows.

The Hu have ascended from the ranks of the small clubs on their first US tour in 2019, and with their shortened, half-hour opening set comes additional challenges. “When we’ve headlined, the fans have come to see us and they know what they’re in for,” says Jaya, via their artist manager and interpreter, Solongo. “But on this tour, you’ve got a mixture of fans who have come for Megadeth and Five Finger Death Punch and [openers] Fire From The Gods, so we have to prove ourselves every single night. It’s been an excellent lesson.”

Most profiles of the band lean into the fish-out-of-water angle: a Mongolian band, playing the ‘exotic’ fusion of traditional native folk music and metal that The Hu have dubbed ‘Hunnu Rock’, drawing lyrical inspiration from their



Action stations, lads!

history and culture. But The Hu have worked hard to dispel the whiff of novelty, their music and performance instead standing on its own two feet.

Sirius XM DJ Jose Mangin is one of the US metal scene’s leading tastemakers, presenting on both the Liquid Metal and Octane channels. He regularly champions up-and-coming bands from across the globe and was one of the first in the US to get behind The Hu.

“I think that it’s hard to break through in the States for global metal acts,” Jose tells *Hammer*. “But then again, it worked for a German language band like Rammstein. There’s always going to be a weird barrier for these bands who put a lot of culture into their music. I think the Hu have an uphill battle ahead of them but I think it’s a battle that they can win.”

The Hu aren’t the first band to blend traditional Mongolian folk music with metal. Tengger Cavalry, fronted by the late Nature Ganganbaigal, released a string of acclaimed



The Hu hanging out with their new 5FDP BFFs

albums in the early 2010s, even relocating to the US in an attempt to crack the North American market. But they largely remain an obscurity to most US metal fans. Plus The Hu see little connection between what Tengger Cavalry did a decade ago and what they are doing now.

"They had no effect on our sound," says Gala. "The Hunnu rock genre was created by our producer Dashka, right down to the way that we tune our instruments, which is totally different from Western music. It was created from scratch by Dashka and, as performers, we added our own spices and flavours."

By late afternoon, it remains blistering hot. Still in their street clothes, the band to head over to a meet-and-greet. Among the pack of fans waiting is Dante Patnode, a US marine who drove up from military base Camp Pendleton for the occasion. He's seen The Hu on all of their US tours. "I'd say their music is very different from what people are used to," he says. "Maybe it's even an acquired taste, but it really empowers you. They're already big now and they're only getting bigger."

Also waiting in line is a diminutive seven year-old Vietnamese girl, Colette Nguyen, who is here with her parents Duc and Nhung. As she poses for her photo with the band, Gala cries out and the entire band roar a thundering war chant. She beams. "We livestreamed Coachella this year and Colette immediately took to their sound," says her father Duc. "So we went to Spotify and looked them up."



Some things need no translation

Colette said, 'Alexa, play The Hu.' We've been listening to them every day since."

When all the fans have secured their photos, security leads them back outside. Colette turns for one last up-close look at her heroes and, just as she does, Jaya looks back and sees her. He runs over, leans down and gives her a massive hug.

Returning to the backstage compound, The Hu are greeted with backslaps and fistbumps by other musicians and crew. Due to the language barrier, there aren't many conversations with people outside their camp. Occasionally, their attempts at English have resulted in some amusing moments. During a recent show, Jaya stepped up to the microphone, intending to say, "I love you guys!" Instead, he announced, "I love guys!"



“I THINK THE HU HAVE AN UPHILL BATTLE AHEAD OF THEM – BUT IT’S A BATTLE THEY CAN WIN”

SIRIUS XM DJ JOSE MANGIN

“One of the guys signalled to me that I had said it wrong, so I quickly corrected myself by saying, “We love guys!”” he says, laughing at his double mistake.

As the band get dressed in readiness for their set, we sit down with Dashka, credited as B. Dashdondog on 2019’s *The Gereg*. He’s aware that English-speaking audiences can be resistant to non-English-speaking bands, but insists that The Hu won’t compromise their approach.

“People might feel like you need to sing in English or play traditional rock instruments to really succeed,” he says, “but throat singing is such an important element of our sound, we have to keep singing in Mongolian. Honestly, I don’t know what challenges are coming but when they do, we’ll deal with them.”

By the time The Hu are ready to stride out in front of the FivePoint crowd in their full regalia, a small crowd of musicians and onlookers has gathered at the side of the stage, among them Five Finger Death Punch bassist Chris Kael, Megadeth bassist James LoMenzo and members of Fire From The Gods.

The band appear to a hail of applause from the audience, their traditional costumes a sharp contrast to the wall of Marshalls behind them. As they unleash the stomping fury of *Black Thunder*, heads begin to bang, mobile phones are raised and fans pour into the aisles and start dancing, much to the dismay of security.

This might be a Megadeth/Five Finger Death Punch audience, but it’s apparent that they know who The Hu are and, more importantly, the fact that they’re singing in Mongolian isn’t an issue. A roar of recognition greets *Wolf Totem*, and by the time closer *This Is Mongol* echoes into the California sky, it’s clear that any linguistic and



cultural distance between The Hu and US metal fans will not be a problem.

As roadies set up the stage for Megadeth out front, the post-show party kicks into gear in The Hu’s trailer. Members of the band mingle with friends. 5FDP’s Zoltan Bathory and Chris Kael pop in for a chat and a photo. “We have something for you!” the band’s interpreter, Solongo, tells *Hammer*, proffering a strange white elixir in a plastic cup to join in a toast with the band. Upon discovering that it’s fermented horse milk, a traditional Mongolian drink, we respectfully decline.

The response from just a few dates into the tour has been overwhelmingly positive, though The Hu are unsurprised by this. “We started learning instruments when we were small children. Instead of playing outside with our friends, we sacrificed that part of our lives in service to the music that we now perform today,” says Gala. “Those sacrifices are paying off now and they’re contributing to the success that we’re now experiencing.”

Sirius XM’s Jose Mangin agrees. “They’re already doing what they need to do,” he says. “Going out with these mainstream mega-bands is the way to get into the hearts of listeners in the States. I don’t think they need to change their approach and sing in English. That’s not their thing. They need to keep doing what they’re doing and the rest of the world will catch up.”

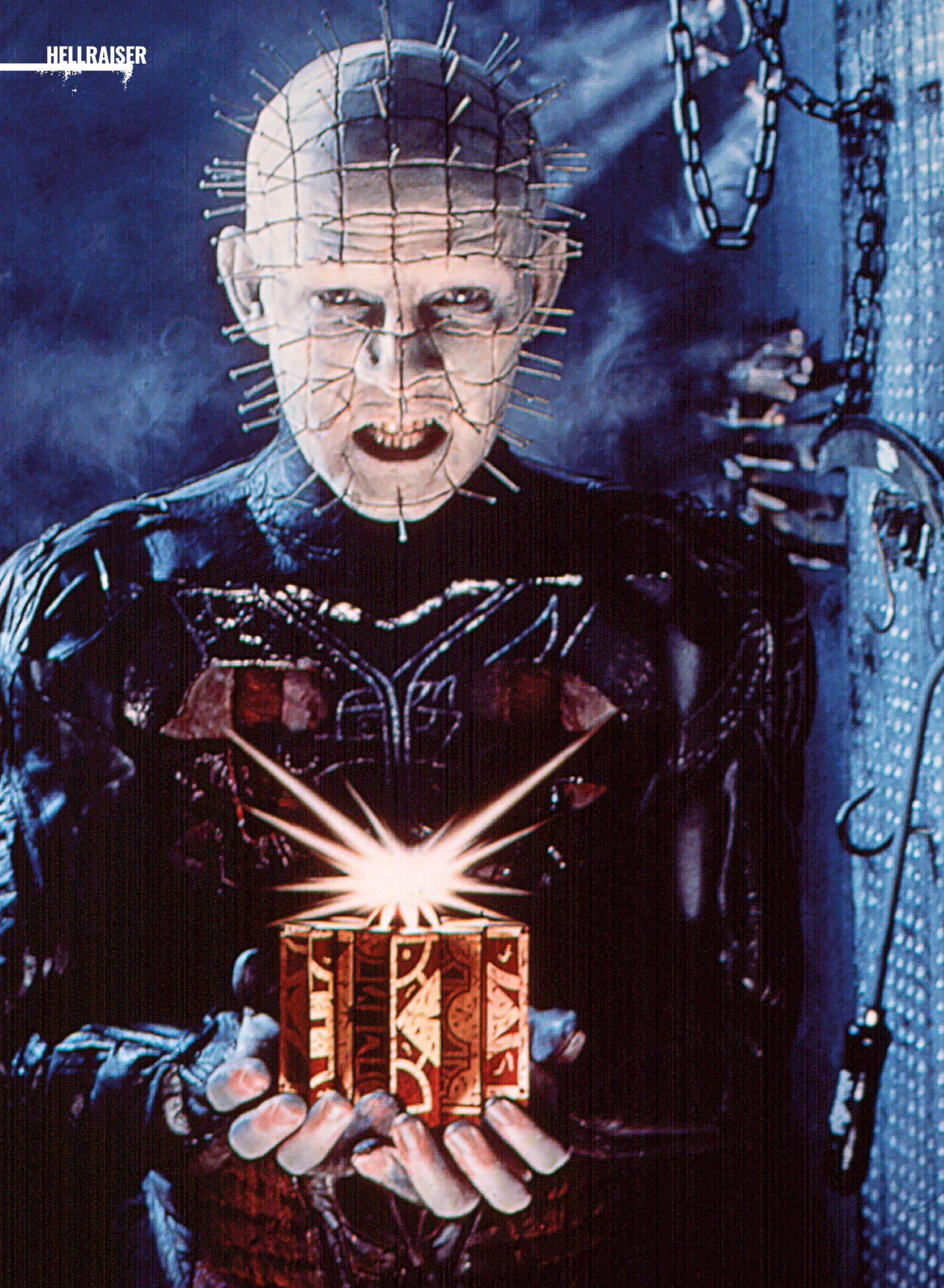
Success in the US and Europe is important for any band, no matter where they’re from. But for The Hu, it’s just as important to spread Mongolian culture where they go.

“Success is hard to measure,” Gala says, “but if people hear and enjoy our music, and when future generations have heard of the Mongolian band called The Hu, then we’ll know we’ve succeeded.”

The Hu are definitely ready for America. On tonight’s evidence, America is definitely ready for The Hu too. **H**

RUMBLE OF THUNDER IS OUT NOW ON BETTER NOISE. THE HU’S UK TOUR BEGINS IN MANCHESTER ON NOVEMBER 28

HELLRAISER



SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

Nightmarish. Disturbing. Transgressive. Weird.
Hellraiser was the twisted fantasy horror that gave the world
Pinhead and influenced generations of metal bands

WORDS: EMMA COWNLEY

Lt's the autumn of 1987, and actor Doug Bradley is on the phone to his childhood friend, the author Clive Barker. They've just finished working together on a low-budget horror film called *Hellraiser*. It's Doug's first film role and Clive's directorial debut. Although the actor's part is small, his nightmarish character, Pinhead, dominates the movie's poster.

"He was calling me from the back of a car in Los Angeles," recalls Doug today. "He was saying, 'Just wanted to let you know, you're currently 30 feet high over Sunset Boulevard for your first job.' I thought, 'Well, that's cool, but it'll all be forgotten about fairly soon.'"

He couldn't have been more wrong. A cult hit at the time, *Hellraiser*'s status as one of horror's greatest and most unsettling movies has only grown in the 35 years since it was released. A nightmarish, occasionally surreal story of a man who trades his soul for "an experience beyond limits" only to be swallowed into a hellscape where he's torn apart by demonic entities called Cenobites, it was totally different to the mainstream horror of the time. Its interdimensional sex torture wasn't for everybody, but it connected with those whose tastes veered towards the strange and the transgressive – not least within the metal community.

In the 35 years since its release, *Hellraiser*'s story, visuals and aesthetics have inspired bands from Ministry to Cradle Of Filth.

"What I love about it is it has a very fairy tale element," says Cradle of Filth frontman Dani Filth. "It's the whole Narnia-type scenario, gone to Hell."

As the saying goes: if you want something done right, do it yourself. Clive Barker had burst onto the horror fiction scene in the mid-80s with his short story collections, *Books Of Blood*. Whereas the likes of Stephen King and James Herbert were writing more traditional horror stories, the Liverpool-born author's stories were an amalgam of dark fantasy, erotica and surrealist body horror.

Having had two of his stories, *Underworld* and *Rawhead Rex*, mangled in transition to the big screen, Clive decided that it was time he tried his hand at directing a film based on his own work.

"The only way to do this was to write the novella [*The Hellbound Heart*] with the specific intention of filming it," he told *Starburst* magazine. "For me, [*Hellraiser*] was a chance to see if I could put what I felt I was putting onto the page onto the screen."

Securing \$900,000 from film company New World Pictures, Clive assembled a small cast, including Sean Chapman as the hedonistic Frank Cotton and Claire Higgins as his lover, Julia. He also called on his old friend Doug Bradley to play the lead Cenobite, officially named 'Hell Priest'. Doug had spent several years in a theatre group with the author, and whatever the latter was working on, he was game.

"The context for me at the time was that it was another project to work with Clive," Doug says. "For me, it was an ongoing process."

The movie stayed relatively faithful to the original novella: the sadomasochistic Frank Cotton is sucked into a hellish dimension after summoning the demonic Cenobites with an ancient puzzle box known as the Lament Configuration, sparking murder, regeneration and a Faustian bargain with the Cenobites.

Like the story itself, *Hellraiser*'s aesthetics resembled nothing else in contemporary horror films. The Cenobites themselves were inspired by 70s punk, Catholic iconography and Clive's trips to S&M clubs in New York and Amsterdam,



Pinhead was fully prepared for electricity price hikes

each marred with unique deformities and elaborate scarification, ranging from excised throats to mouths pulled open with hooks.

Doug Bradley's own iconic make-up took six hours to create. The novella describes the Hell Priest as a being of indeterminate gender, "tattooed with an intricate grid" across their head and face, with jewelled pins driven down to the bone at each intersection. Doug's blue eyes were covered with glassy black contact lenses to remove any trace of humanity and his skin was transformed to the mottled white of a corpse.

Before his first screen test, Doug spent 20 minutes alone in his dressing room, staring into a mirror and trying to make sense of his unrecognisable face. Once on set, he was repeatedly given the same note from an excited Clive: do less.

"If you keep on being told 'do less', you wind up where you feel like you're just standing on your marks, not emoting anything and just speaking words," says Doug of his cold, inscrutable performance. "And really what Clive was saying to me was, 'Do exactly that,' because the makeup is working overtime on your behalf. The more you don't sell it, the more you're selling it."

Clive approached experimental industrial/electronic duo Coil to create the soundtrack, confident their disturbing music would match the mood of the movie. Coil proceeded to record a demo, but the studio overruled the director, opting for a soundtrack by horror movie composer Christopher Young instead.

"The soundtrack bought the film to life," recalls Dani Filth. "It has this dark, rich, sort of fairy-tale tapestry to it."

When *Hellraiser* opened in September 1987, critics were divided. Some panned it as explicit trash and others saw it as the herald of a new age of horror. It refused to conform to the campy, comedy-edged frights of *Evil Dead II* and *A Nightmare On Elm Street 3*, both released the same year. *Hellraiser* was a collision of the profane and the sacred, the mundane and the fantastical, suggesting extreme pleasure might be indistinguishable from pain.

Doug Bradley's character – dubbed 'Pinhead' on account of his extreme acupuncture chic – was an instant hit. While he only appeared in the movie for a total of eight minutes,



The Lament Configuration: what's wrong with a good old Rubik's Cube?

“EVEN THOUGH I WAS A REAL HORROR MOVIE BUFF BACK THEN, IT SHOCKED US”

DANI FILTH

it was Pinhead who appeared on the movie poster above the tagline ‘He’ll tear your soul apart.’

“I’ve always said that the image [of Pinhead] is an image of received pain,” says Doug. “‘Look what was done to me’ or ‘Look what I did to myself’... ‘Now imagine what I could do to you.’”

Hellraiser grossed \$14.5 million at the box office, which was seriously impressive considering its meagre budget. It gained a wider cult following after its release on VHS video. That’s how a 14-year-old Dani Filth saw came across it.

“My friend’s dad had a video shop in our village, and he managed to get an advanced copy of it,” says Dani. “I’m ashamed to admit it, but a few of my friends stole it out of his bag so we could watch it. We watched it round my

friend’s house, and even though I was a real horror movie buff back then, I think it shocked us. There were so many disturbing scenes.”

One of the most disturbing scenes comes when Frank Cotton is resurrected from the Cenobite hell, pulling himself half-formed out of the floorboards; he’s later recaptured by the Cenobites and torn apart by hooks while wearing his brother’s skin as a suit.

“Barker’s work is a rich tapestry of dark fantasy. The supposition between sex and death, Eros and Thanatos, and love/hate,” says Dani Filth. “I think *Hellraiser* is a very strong metaphor for death as well, because no one has come back from the other side of the doorway, so there is that mystery.”

Hellraiser’s bloody fingerprints began to appear on the music scene soon after its release. Canadian industrial outfit Skinny Puppy used a sample from the film on their 1989 track *Fascist Jock Itch*, with Ministry, White Zombie and Entombed following suit. The movie didn’t just bleed into the music either – its influence was visual, too.

“When I had my first leather costume made, it was like, ‘Yeah, just look at the Cenobites, I want something like that!’” admits Dani. “And this was back in ’97.”

Cradle Of Filth aren’t the only band to draw on *Hellraiser*’s aesthetic. Dimmu Borgir channelled the Cenobites’ fetishistic, chain-swinging, leather-clad look onstage and ►

Dear old Uncle Frank and his niece, Kirsty. Not the healthiest relationship, it has to be said



on album covers – the female-torso-bound-in-barbed-wire image on 2001's *Puritanical Euphoric Misanthropy* album is very Clive Barker, while the song *Hybrid Stigmata* from that record borrows lines from *Hellraiser* for good measure. Similarly, Meshuggah's video for their 2008 track *Bleed* drew inspiration from the movie, and the Swedish band released their own limited edition *Hellraiser* merch at 2017's San Diego Comic-Con.

It hasn't just been one-way traffic, either. Motörhead contributed the song *Hellraiser* (originally written by Lemmy for Ozzy Osbourne) to 1992's 'threequel' *Hellraiser III: Hell On Earth*, even enlisting Doug Bradley to appear in the music video in full Pinhead regalia, playing poker with Lemmy. Doug himself has become an honorary member of the metal community, contributing vocals to several Cradle Of Filth songs, including *Her Ghost In The Fog* and *Mother Of Abominations*.

"Doug has got a very imperious voice and it's very synonymous straight away," says Dani. "He's terrifying, almost comforting as well. And that marriage of extremes with his voice and his performance... it's very dominating."

In the wake of *Hellraiser*'s cult success, New World Pictures greenlit a sequel, triggering a franchise that currently stands at 11 films. Fan consensus is that the subsequent movies started off strong but became progressively worse. "I've watched most of them, and the more that Doug got filtered out until eventually he was replaced kinda turned me off," says Dani.

A *Hellraiser* reboot is airing on US streaming service Hulu this month, with Clive Barker onboard as producer and actress Jamie Clayton as the new Pinhead. Dani predicts that

"I'VE ALWAYS SAID THAT IT'S AN IMAGE OF RECEIVED PAIN"

DOUG BRADLEY ON HIS CHARACTER, PINHEAD

a new generation of musicians will find inspiration in it.

"There's a lot of bands fronted by women, so I should imagine it will translate into that area," Dani says of the updated

Pinhead. "There's a band called Sick N' Beautiful, and they have a very over-the-top aesthetic about them. I could see it translate into their image, or a band such as Jinjer."

Pinhead and the Cenobites remain the key to *Hellraiser*'s lasting legacy. Their mystique and cold majesty give them an inescapable gravitas that has enthralled and inspired subsequent generations of horror fans and musicians alike.

"I've always said you can take the Cenobites out of that story completely. Forget they exist, and you have a serviceable slasher movie," says Doug. "Then Clive takes a grain of pure gothic horror, and into the middle of this urban slasher movie, he just drops 'the things in the attic' and boom! Everything opens up."

It's that grain of pure gothic horror, that flirtation with the bizarre and the fantastical, that makes *Hellraiser* so unforgettable. Like the fairy tales that take us into hidden worlds, so *Hellraiser*'s dark, depraved story remains eternally captivating. Once the ancient puzzle box is opened, there is no going back. **H**

HULU'S NEW HELLRAISER MOVIE IS STREAMING NOW. THE UK RELEASE DATE IS TBC

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the bands that produced them...

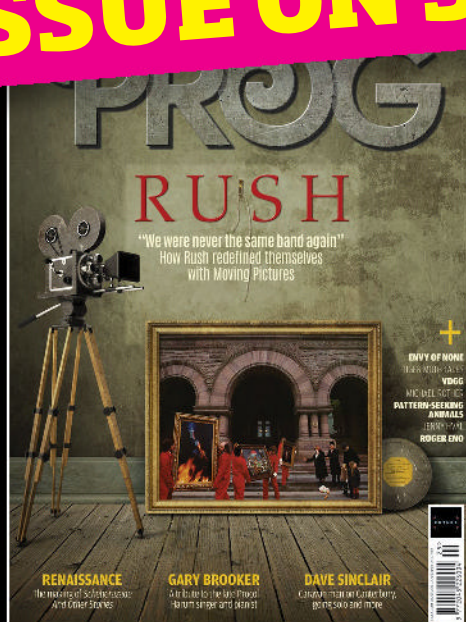
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Dave Grohl leads an all-star elegy
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ALBUM REVIEWS

Devin Townsend: ready to give you a heavy metal hug

**“ONE SECTION
SOUNDS LIKE
CRASH BANDICOOT
WITH A GUITAR”**

DEVIN TOWNSEND

Lightwork

INSIDEOUT MUSIC

Canada's prog-metal mastermind swaps the manic for the oceanic

MUCH LIKE ENYA, Devin Townsend years to sail away. The Canadian multi-instrumentalist has been poised with his floaties since 2016, when he prematurely bade farewell to his main hustle, The Devin Townsend Project. This was communicated via liner notes for the DTP's *Transcendence* album, in which he posed with a coconut cocktail, next to a dolphin. An extremely clear, normal way to tell people you're done with a band. Three years later, he paddled into uncharted territory with *Empath* – his most accomplished, overblown record to date, replete with beach-themed merch and seagull noises. *Lightwork* offers more nautical nuggets, albeit less frantically.

Empath was do-a-backflip-while-breathing-fire-and-winning-the-lottery-and-wanking music. This is not. It's Devin's first time properly working with a producer, resulting in his shortest studio effort for a decade. It's still 56 minutes long, mind, but each second is stuffed to the girdle with prog rock merriment, as Devin's wall-of-sound is moulded by Garth Richardson – a man who's produced arena regulars like Biffy Clyro and Nickelback.

If ears could chew, *Lightwork* would dribble down the sides of your head to the point of indecency. It sounds delicious. Sort-of title-track *Lightworker* is the closest Devin's come to actualising the dream he's chased since 2012's *Epicloud*: hippies playing major-key metal, but kinda doing Rodgers & Hammerstein with a bit of gospel. That seems like an awful idea, but when Dev's operatic 'Tell me there's another!' booms over the chorus, strings flying and choirs cooing, you can't help but be moved. The earnestness, the commitment, is what sells the moment. *Equinox* pulls a similar

trick, his shrill scream of 'The world is gonna turn without you, baby!' drawing tears rather than blood.

Familiarity lends *Lightwork* a welcome

confidence and comfort, often playing like a more direct, hooky version of DTP's *Sky Blue* from 2014. It's a heavy metal hug. The presence of previous collaborators like Ché Aimee Dorval and Anneke van Giersbergen makes it feel worn-in, as do the sweep-picked

bouts of silliness, orchestral bursts, and space-age guitars that are now short-hand for 'that Devin Townsend thing'. They're such disparate elements, but it all seems so simple when assembled by his weird puppeteer's glove.

On *Empath*, Devin pissed out the kidney stone of his old industrial/death/Monty Python band, Strapping Young Lad. *Hear Me* was that record's callback; this time around, we have *Dimensions*. It's SYL by composition rather than attitude, the final half-minute grinding like that band's *Aftermath*. But he's not doing it to prove anything, juxtaposing brutality with a section that's basically Crash Bandicoot being given a guitar. It's overbearing but never unpleasant, slotting perfectly alongside *Vacation*'s chilled-out acoustics, or the carnivalesque, cartoonish stomp on *Heavy Burden* and *Moonpeople*.

Lightwork literally starts and ends with a foghorn, revealing a man lost at sea who's found liberation: emotionally, sonically. It's also a record that was nearly delayed – for a second time – because Devin couldn't secure the rights for a *Barbie Girl* sample. If that sounds like a bit of you, then turn it up, up, adieu.

FOR FANS OF: Ween, Between The Buried And Me, Porcupine Tree

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH



ABDUCTION

Black Blood

CANDLELIGHT

Derby's cosmic black metallers fuse the feral and the far-out

Founded upon a tenet of raw, cosmic BM, Abduction have evolved rapidly since 2016 as a solo act. Their fourth album's increased production values, members and clarity are immediately evident on *Kernos Crown*, retaining their feral nature while adding increased groove and nuance. Eleven-minute, progressively leaning centrepiece *Plutonian Gate* adopts a sonorous, reverential tone building to militant riff chaos. *Black Blood* constructs a more accessible framework upon which to drape its malodorous offerings – a solid balance between void reverence and excoriating intensity.

FOR FANS OF: Tombs, The Infernal Sea, Wode

TOM O'BOYLE



THE ANTICHRIST IMPERIUM

Volume III: Satan In His Original Glory

APOCALYPTIC WITCHCRAFT

Akercocke-aligned, infernal diehards complete an evil trilogy

A meeting of blasphemous minds, The Antichrist Imperium have been quietly evolving since 2018's *Volume II: Every Tongue Shall Praise Satan*. The Anglo-Aussie quartet's third album maintains its predecessor's dense blend of full-bore death metal and warped, progressive detours, but with much

more ambition and imagination. *Vilest Of Beasts* is nine minutes of imperious unholiness as it switches from crushing trad metal riffs to miasmic post-punk, stopping off at several weird checkpoints along the way. David Gray's drumming is the hypnotic pulse, while vocalist Sam Loynes delivers a wildly versatile performance, injecting askance melody into the otherwise pulverising likes of *Exorcist Evisceration*. Maximum devilry, and glorious indeed.

■■■■■■■■■■■

FOR FANS OF: Akercocke, Voices, Belphegor

DOM LAWSON



AVANTASIA

A Paranormal Evening With The Moonflower Society

NUCLEAR BLAST

Symphonic power metal maestros continue to go large

After eight instalments of overblown classic melo-metal, you'd expect Tobias Sammet's rock opera project to be creaking under its own weight. But fans know what to expect: crowd-pleasing hard rock anthems with a cast of vocal collaborators to take it to the next level. Having already worked with Alice Cooper, Sharon den Adel and Dee Snider, the biggest star to drop into the studio this time is Nightwish's Floor Jansen, who sounds completely at home among bellowing choirs and soaring guitars on *Kill The Pain* Away and the Broadway-ready bombast of *Misplaced Among The Angels*. Once again, Avantasia prove that, sometimes, more is definitely more.

■■■■■■■■■■■

FOR FANS OF: Meat Loaf, Jim Steinman, Blind Guardian

DANNII LEIVERS



Architects seek out new horizons beyond the metalcore gates

ARCHITECTS

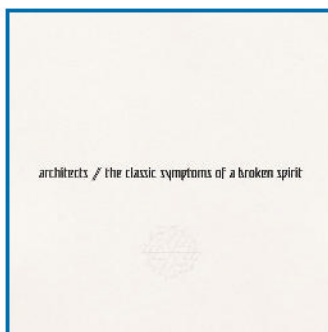
The Classic Symptoms Of A Broken Spirit

EPITAPH

Brighton's metalcore A-listers plot their big escape

NEXT YEAR WILL be the 10-year anniversary of Bring Me The Horizon's *Sempiternal*. It says much about the quality of that album and the shadow it casts that, even a decade after its release, it's still often the go-to record for bands desperate to break out of the metalcore ghetto. Brighton's Architects, though, were never one of those bands happy to ride along on the coattails of the leaders. They have a wonderfully diverse back catalogue of modern metal, and they're a rare example of a band capable of crafting something distinct and instantly recognisable. But even they aren't immune from *Sempiternal*'s gravitational pull.

The qualities that make Architects stand out haven't gone away here on their 10th studio album. *The Classic Symptoms Of A Broken Spirit* is still full of those thick, crunching, stomping guitar riffs; some hugely propulsive, techy grooves; and Sam Carter remains one of the most dexterous and singular voices in metal. But, the evolution and the size of Architects – this coming off the back of



2021's *For Those That Wish To Exist* topping the UK album charts – has led the band to a place where they clearly want to capitalise with a big, instant, booming, pop-hook-filled modern metallic rock album.

There's nothing wrong with Architects aiming high, but it does change the parameters of how this record should be judged. Thoughts of

a forward-thinking, daring, experimental and challenging metal record should be moved to one side and replaced with one question: are these songs bangers? And, for the most part, yes they are.

Architects are now entering into an entirely different realm, fighting for attention alongside massive arena guitar heavyweights such as Foals or The 1975, and so, to compete, they're going to need the kind of choruses that have turned those bands into festival headliners. The likes of *Tear Gas* (even though it massively borrows the hook from Nine Inch Nails' *Closer* and the riff from Rammstein's *Sonne*), *Doomscrolling* and *Spit The Bone* all

sound just as colossal and made for mainstream radio and festival fields as *Sempiternal* songs like *Shadow Moses* and *Can You Feel My Heart* did a decade back.

Sempiternal, however, is such a clear elder brother of this record that it's hard not to labour the point. The one clear stylistic standout is *A New Moral Low Ground*, which dips slightly into jazz chords and an 80s synth throb. It's more Glass Animals than metalcore, but it's a hell of an earworm all the same. Purists will undoubtedly stamp their feet, and a lack of breakdowns and 'Bleugh!'s are sure to fire online ire until the next big band from this scene try to make their escape, but the likely detractors would be missing the point. This is not the most unique, original Architects album, and it's definitely not going to be considered their most 'worthy', but for all the credibility that some may feel the band have sacrificed, they've done something arguably even harder: they've shown they can write some absolutely shit-hot floor-fillers. Good for them.

FOR FANS OF: Bring Me The Horizon, Royal Blood, Linkin Park

STEPHEN HILL

**AVATARUM***Death, Where Is Your Sting*
AFM

Sweden's progressive doom crew turn over a new leaf

In many ways, Avatarium's fifth album feels like a definitive waypoint. It's their first without founding member Leif Edling, and cements their drift from the 'purer' doom of their earlier material to something more individualistic. While it's likely the spectre of Leif's Candlemass will never truly be banished, it is often kept at bay. Stockholm serves as the perfect example, its grunting Sabbathantime riff merely the backdrop for a proggy, folkish lilt that somehow splices the epic balladeering of both Fairport Convention and Manowar. Jennie-Ann Smith firmly takes the reins as vocalist and now sole lyricist, her versatile, bluesy voice as capable of driving thoughtful introspection as the lithe crunch of the album's most outwardly metal number, *God Is Silent*.

**FOR FANS OF:** Lucifer, Hammers Of Misfortune, Tiamat

ALEX DELLER

**BIRDS IN ROW***Gris Klein*
RED CREEK

Artful, angular hardcore delirium from the Parisian shadows

This Parisian hardcore trio's last album, 2018's *We Already Lost The World*, received unanimous praise. For their third

full-length, Birds In Row continue to push their radical experimental punk, adding dreamy, tremolo-picked guitar lines, an angular Sonic Youth sensibility and unorthodox effects to their acerbic and angular attack. Vocal hooks are given more space to breathe in amongst the maelstrom, most notably on *Noah* and *Grisaille*. Diehards might worry that these additions would result in an album with its edges rounded off, but *Gris Klein* is as gloriously acerbic and abstract as its predecessor, perhaps even more so. The gloriously off-kilter, effects-heavy riff to *Rodin* is proof that Birds In Row aren't done experimenting and pushing themselves into new territories. A glorious leap forward for a band who were already on the verge of greatness.

**FOR FANS OF:** At The Drive-In, Fugazi, The Blood Brothers

REMFREY DEDMAN

**BLODHEMN***Sverger Hemn*
DARK ESSENCE

Norway's black metal maestro casts his glare beyond the 90s

Since 2004, Blodhemn's solo mastermind Invisus has lionised the unyielding blackened vision of his Norwegian forebears with a raw, biting style rendered in crusty, early 90s production values. The result has been a series of dutiful – and occasionally thrilling – black metal collections steeped in frosted riffs, blasting tempos and innovative fretwork. His latest campaign expands this vision with seven pointedly wicked tracks, coursing with rage and blasphemy. More ambitious than its predecessors,

Sverger Hemn's production is robust, giving *Vil Livet Av Deg* and *Opp Or Lemmen* a swaggering air of unstoppable might. *Bomb Bergen* erupts with thrashy violence and closer *Tid* showcases a swirling undercurrent of gothic malice that builds to a suitably apocalyptic climax. It's relieving to hear Blodhemn honouring the past with his eyes squarely toward the future.

**FOR FANS OF:** Svarttjern, Watain, Dissection

JOE DALY

**CAVERNOUS GATE***Voices From A Fathomless Realm*
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Doom/death odyssey falls short of its destination

Cavernous Gate is a true solo project, Helrunar's Sebastian Korkemeier having written and performed everything here bar the female vocals to help him get out of his comfort zone. It's a shame, then, that this dark, hour-long trip fails to fulfil its promise, as if there was too much ground for him to cover at once. The overly neat and tidy production by Empyrium's Markus Stock doesn't help; while it works on *Through The Morass*, which touches on ambient and post-punk, it sterilises Sebastian's more extreme tendencies, sedating the intended stark, emotional contrast. You can catch a glimpse of what might have been on the very Opeth-esque *Conjuration*, but overall you can't shake that feeling that *Voices...* lacks that required extra oomph to achieve its ambitious sloughing.

**FOR FANS OF:** Opeth, Bethlehem, Katatonia

OLIVIER BADIN



Alter Bridge check in at the riff factory

ALTER BRIDGE*Pawns & Kings*
NAPALM

Myles Kennedy and Mark Tremonti restock their top drawer

SEVEN ALBUMS INTO their career, the chances of getting your hands on a new Alter Bridge album and being surprised by anything you hear are slim to none. This is a band who know what they do, know how to do it well, and seem content to deliver another big, fat, satisfying slice of it every few years. Those who crave creative sonic exploration from their artists may scoff at Alter Bridge for snugly remaining in their corner of the music world, but really the joke is on them, because there is nothing unworthy about a consistent ability to write excellent, instantaneous, colossal rock anthems.

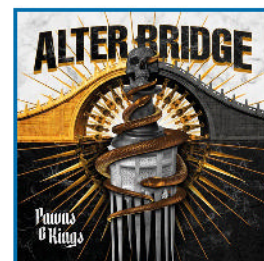
Pawns & Kings just feels good. *Dead Among The Living* struts along as Myles Kennedy's honey-coated voice delivers a hook that buries into your brain. Then there's Myles and guitarist Mark Tremonti duetting on the earnest, skyscraper post-grunge of *Stay* and Mark living out his Dimebag Darrell fantasies on the groove metal stomp of *Holiday*. Myles's vocals go from a whisper to a roar on the title track, backed by a juicy, thick cut of pure riff goodness from Tremonti, and when they move into full rage mode, as they do on the thrashy *Silver Tongue*, you'd have to be a cloth-eared fool to deny that this is a band with bite. Frankly, every moment here inspires a clenched fist; a banged head; a hop, skip and a jump in your walk.

It's nothing new by this band's standards, but these types of songs are incredibly difficult to get right, and if that's hard to believe then check out many of Alter Bridge's lumpy and forgettable peers. That they're able to keep the listener interested and engaged this deep into their career without ever really deviating from their core sound is proof of their calibre.

Pawns & Kings might be exactly what everyone expects from Alter Bridge, but it's also exactly what any true fan would want from them: quality and consistency personified.

**FOR FANS OF:** Alice In Chains, Audioslave, Chevelle

STEPHEN HILL





Brutus: a shining example of post-hardcore creativity

BRUTUS

Unison Life

HASSLE/SARGENT HOUSE

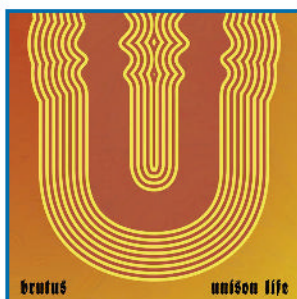
Belgium's atmospheric post-hardcore sensations turn up the heat

BRUTUS EMERGED IN 2017 in a storm of shimmering shoegaze, raw punk and tightly controlled turbulence, and immediately carved out a thrilling niche for themselves.

The story goes that Lars Ulrich was so into their debut, *Burst*, that he invited the Belgian trio to come and hang out with him backstage at one of Metallica's 2017 London shows. Thrice drummer Riley Breckenridge loved the band's incandescent post-hardcore so much he booked them to support his band on the European leg of their 2018 tour.

By the time the band released their 2019 follow-up, *Nest*, Converge drummer Ben Koller, Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil and Dillinger's Greg Puciato had all declared themselves fans. And for obvious reasons, too. *Nest* was built on already strong foundations, veering between claustrophobic walls of cataclysmic sound and expansive, cathedral-sized spaces to devastating effect. It was a contrast of extremes that the band have sensibly taken to even greater heights on their third studio album.

From the outset, *Unison Life* is the band's most dynamic record to date, the chasm between their combustible tendencies and the more spacey, contemplative moments searing



with white-hot energy. *Miles Away* kicks off the album with sinister keys, punctuated by crashing stabs of guitar, mushrooming moments later into *Brave* – a punk squall that's pulled painfully taut, but could well collapse into abandon at any second. Holding it all together is drummer/vocalist Stefanie Mannaerts, who does an admirable job of driving the album's galloping pace while carrying its deceptively indelible melodies.

On *What Have We Done* and *Dust*, Stefanie's throaty vocals shake with urgent, barely contained emotion. By the time they close with the euphoric but violent *Desert Rain*, your body and senses feel shredded, like taking the breath of life after a long stretch of hopelessness. This is exhilarating stuff.

■■■■■■■■■■■
FOR FANS OF: Svalbard, Møl, Ithaca
DANNII LEIVERS



COUNTERPARTS

A Eulogy For Those Still Here

PURE NOISE

Canada's metalcore heavyweights reach a euphoric new high

Counterparts' seventh album boasts some of the Ontario band's best songwriting to date. Not only does it see the return of original guitarists Jesse Doreen and Alex Re, who can be heard soaring throughout, but Brendan Murphy's lyrics and delivery are intoxicatingly raw. Early singles gave a taste of the album's euphoric aggression, but only scratched the surface. Mixing vulnerability and fury, *Bound To The Burn*, *Soil II* and *Sworn To Silence* stand gloriously strong, but *A Eulogy...* deserves to be listened to in its entirety. Darker and more crushing, yet more melodic and atmospheric than ever, this is the sound of a band truly finding their home.

■■■■■■■■■■■
FOR FANS OF: The Amity Affliction, Heart In Hand, Misery Signals

NIK YOUNG



EXIST IMMORTAL

Exist Immortal

SEEK AND STRIKE

Weight and wonder from London's progressive metalcore quintet

Exist Immortal's impressive mastery over their instruments is capable of producing earth-shaking grooves and layered passages that ebb and flow with grace. Their latest album channels their heaviest past glories while exploring more ambitious guitar arrangements. *Flare*

is replete with dizzying solos and sees vocalist Meyrick de la Fuente on soul-stirring form. The songs are life-affirming and emotive, the slower moments are bewitched by sublimely produced melodies, while the synth-laden melodic aggression of *On The Wire* and *Casting Eyes* takes hold like a hyper-fuelled Monuments mixed with early Sikh. *Exist Immortal* places the London quintet back on the prog-metal map and makes them more vital than ever.

■■■■■■■■■■■
FOR FANS OF: Monuments, Circles, Hacktivist

SOPHIE MAUGHAN



FAETOOTH

Remnants Of The Vessel

DUNE ALTAR

Bleak doom digressions from the City Of Angels

Its lead single *Echolia* may be a driving doom-pop anthem, but this LA quartet's debut album sounds just as comfortable on more oppressive, nihilistic dirges like *Discarnate*. With vocals split between bassist Jenna Garcia and guitarists Ashla Chavez Razzano and Ari May, Faetooth have plenty of expressive voices at their disposal, ranging from piercingly harsh shrieks to a husky yet soaring croon. *Remnants Of The Vessel* is an even darker affair than *Echolia* lets on, with tracks like the bleak yet shoegaze-y *Remains* and epic closer *Saturn Devouring His Son* opting for a starker, brooding sense of unease. A significant step up from their 2019 EP, *Remnants...* solidifies Faetooth as a band that deserve to be on your radar.

■■■■■■■■■■■
FOR FANS OF: Subrosa, 13, Windhand
KEZ WHELAN



FEAR FACTORY

Recoded

NUCLEAR BLAST

Industrial metal kingpins discover the law of diminishing returns

Fear Factory famously tried their hand at the remix album with 1997's *Remanufacture*. An accompaniment to their 1995 classic *Demanufacture*, it felt like an incredibly forward-thinking and innovative thing to do back then. Years later, plenty of bands have tried the same thing, from Linkin Park to Bring Me The Horizon. It's proof of Fear Factory's influence and inventiveness, but in 2022, *Recoded* feels a little stale. The set consists of remixes by the likes of Zardonic, Rob Gee and longtime collaborator Rhys Fulber, all reimagining songs from last year's *Aggression Continuum*. But, unlike *Remanufacture*, which took its source material some distance from its original form, *Recoded* doesn't do enough with these songs. Zardonic's transformation of *End Of The Line* into a synthpop banger on *Worthless* is great, but there isn't enough imagination on show here to justify the album's existence.



FOR FANS OF: Carpenter Brut, Godflesh, The Prodigy
STEPHEN HILL



FIT FOR A KING

The Hell We Create

SOLID STATE

Texan metallic hardcore troupe put their feet to the fire

The Hell We Create may be the seventh full-length

for Texan quintet Fit For A King, but their bar remains high. The album is packed with memorable, catchy grooves as well as the fast-paced aggression that gives the metallic hardcore band their edge. Vocalist Ryan Kirby almost lost his wife to a stroke during the pandemic, and while the lyrics are deeply personal and the ferocity laced with pain, the melodies are hopeful, making this an emotionally involving and therapeutic experience. It's also a sharp reminder of the band's range, as they shift from dark and menacing to energetic and exhilarating. *Reaper* is brutal, *Sink Below* is radio-friendly, *Eyes Roll Back* is playful and soaring, and the cleans-laden standout, *Times Like This*, features Jonathan Vigil from The Ghost Inside. FFAK know how to turn their challenges into thrilling songwriting.

FOR FANS OF: Erra, Miss May I, Wage War
NIK YOUNG



GET THE SHOT

Merciless Destruction

NEW DAMAGE

Quebecois hardcore unit fall wide of the mark

Get The Shot's fourth album is a mixed bag. On the plus side, *Merciless Destruction* lives up to its name by delving into heavier, more metallic territory that the band previously tip-toed into with their 2017 thrash crossover, *Infinite Punishment*. It's a natural progression that sees the quintet pulling off supercharged riffs and demonic gutturals superbly, notably featured on the ripper *Reign In Blasphemy*. Even with their gradual metallic evolution, there's

no denying that they still hold on to their hardcore roots with unrelenting pride – warts and all, unfortunately. Cringey street machismo and an abundance of film-audio samples come across as contrived and clichéd. These riffs speak for themselves without the aid of gimmicks fans have heard a million times over.



FOR FANS OF: Power Trip, King 810, Hatebreed
HYWEL DAVIES



THE GLOOM IN THE CORNER

Trinity

SHARPTONE

High-concept metalcore crew battle their demons in Hell

This enigmatic Australian metalcore act are ready to plunge us back down the rabbit hole. Delving into their second full-length is no small undertaking; the band's socials reveal 72 pages of lore detailing the complex narrative of their previous records. Shadowy factions, avenged deaths and demonic entities are all a part of frontman Mikey Arthur's richly imagined inner world, and *Trinity* kicks off a new chapter in Hell. With an impressive cohort of guests, it's a wall of intricately technical deathcore that swings between powerful clean melodies as on *Red Clouds* and punishing aural beatdowns as on *Behemoth*. Concept aside, it stands alone as a crushingly heavy cinematic metal album, with *Hail To The King* a satisfyingly devastating closer. At a hefty 13 tracks, though, it's not for the faint of heart.

FOR FANS OF: Fit For An Autopsy, Chelsea Grin, Born Of Osiris

CATHERINE MORRIS

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'



BLITZPÖP

MDMA

SELF-RELEASED

This debut EP by Mother's Cake and The Vintage Caravan alumni is a spiky take on garage rock. The liberated, low-slung grooves mixed with Pia Unterlechner's purring, punk attitude make for an explosive arrival.



HOLLY WRIGHT



DÉCEMBRE NOIR

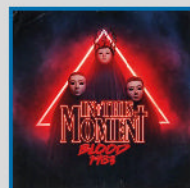
Pale Serenades

LIFEFORCE

Four reworkings of old songs, sung by Aaron Stainthorpe and Matt Heafy among others, this is a glowing advert for Décembre Noir's epic songwriting. Matt's brutal take on *The Forsaken Earth* is worth the price of admission alone.



DOM LAWSON



IN THIS MOMENT

Blood 1983

BMG

2012's *Blood* gets the electronic 80s treatment as Maria Brink et al offer up five reimagined tracks, all throbbing with synthesised beats and irresistible melodies, in celebration of the album's 10-year anniversary.



SOPHIE MAUGHAN



UPON YOUR GRAVE

Gold & Decay

SELF-RELEASED

Enlisting the help of Cryptopsy's Chris Donaldson, this Canadian quintet have returned with a heap of ideas thrown into five tracks. There's also a fair amount of weight in the likes of *From Beyond*'s melodic death groove.



ADAM BRENNAN



WORM

Bluenothing

20 BUCK SPIN

Half of this doom-laden mini-album comes from the same sessions as 2021's putrescent *Foreverglade* LP. The rest harks back to these Floridians' blackened past, with symphonic nods to Emperor and Limbonic Art.



SPENCER GRADY

Dead Cross have battled their issues and emerged victorious



DEAD CROSS

//

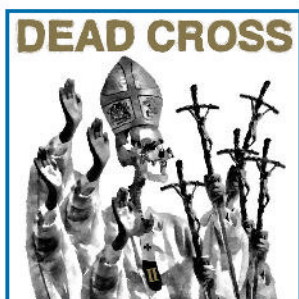
IPECAC

Embattled, Mike Patton-fronted supergroup lives and seethes

NOBODY LOVES A supergroup, really. They rarely live up to their promise. But as Dead Cross's 2017 self-titled debut amply displayed, there are exceptions to the rule. A spontaneous and scrappy explosion of 80s-style crossover thrash, it united heavy rock's most versatile frontman Mike Patton with thrash metal's heaviest pounder, Dave Lombardo. Retox's Michael Crain and The Locust's Justin Pearson filled in the blanks, and the results were one of the most surprising and satisfying debuts of that year. There were monumental barriers to it ever happening again – the pandemic, Mike Patton's acknowledgment of his mental health struggles, Michael's cancer diagnosis and subsequent treatment – but like true thrash warriors, the boys laced up their white Hi Tops and got back to work.

Despite the pedigree of their most famous members, Dead Cross remains their own entity: a focused, identifiable unit. And like their first album, *II* is a furious belching of ribcage, groin and spine. The sound remains rooted in the

world of athletic, punk-inspired thrash metal, but there are surprising twists and turns to be found throughout, with nods to post-punk, deathrock, and even black metal along the way.



Reign Of Error is the true killer of the pack, a gaping red wound of a song, but the fun certainly doesn't end there. *Nightclub Canary* sounds like Black Flag playing while the walls burst into flame all around them; *Strong And Wrong*'s head-first hardcore shred bottoms out into a wild psychedelic

breakdown; *Animal Espionage* evokes the darkness of early LA hardcore; and *Christian Missile Crisis*, a scathing indictment on the US's obsession with God and guns, is an all-encompassing epic of angular thrash that will melt your headphones, and possibly your brain. After a long and blistering season in hell, *II* is a welcome comeback. Barring any more plague or pestilence, let's hope this party hits the road.

FOR FANS OF: Black Flag, D.R.I., Municipal Waste

KEN MCINTYRE



GOD ALONE ETC

PROSTHETIC

Irish math rockers cook up a conundrum

God Alone went to music school together! Who'da thought, given they make Botch sound like Coldplay. The Cork five-piece's ludicrous command of their instruments, dynamics, and seemingly time itself will humble any budding songwriter – but do they have any actual tunes? Sort of. Album two is a spasmodic, occasionally thrilling listen, riposting tranquil post-rock with digitised, blackened hardcore. Whenever GA whip out the synth and drop a stinky beat, they sound like Portrayal Of Guilt and Faithless playing *Take Me Out*. Properly danceable. However, the formula's hampered by some generic post-hardcore breakdowns and deliberately murky vocal production. Sack that off and become The Darude Escape Plan, lads.

FOR FANS OF: Sugar Horse, Seims, The St. Pierre Snake Invasion

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH



GOTHMINISTER Pandemonium

AFM

Norway's industrial metallers seek out the heart of the Mutter

For a band who could be described as the most German band to not come from Germany, it sounds like Gothminister are making a conscious effort to avoid Rammstein

comparisons while maintaining their gothic industrial sound. Driving Eurobeats, ghostly synths and punchy riffs are all present, but the storming title track has singer Bjørn Alexander Brem channelling King Diamond among Dimmu Borgir-esque orchestration, while *Norge* is a captivating metal battle cry. Elsewhere, they don't quite live up to the simple, hooky brilliance of older songs like *Ich Will Alles* without evoking That German Band in a cemetery, but tracks like *Bloodride* are still enjoyably slick, dark and danceable.

FOR FANS OF: Ludovico Technique, Ministry, Rammstein

CATHERINE MORRIS



IMPLORE The Burden Of Existence

CHURCH ROAD

Death/sludge miserabilists find new forms of destruction

The fourth album from these German/Austrian destroyers sees them going harder and heavier in more directions. The meld of death metal, sludge and hardcore is still present. *Archetype* and *Accept The Loss* are acidic, seething sonic punishment, but the no wave-inspired, atonal creep of *Love Will Gradually Perish* provides dynamic deviation. Although that song is the least noisy, it's the intensity with which it's delivered that really impresses. That openness to any musical form, but staunch refusal to drop the severity of the record's aura, is what makes *The Burden Of Existence* well worth investigating.

FOR FANS OF: Converge, Trap Them, These Arms Are Snakes

STEPHEN HILL



INCLINATION

Unaltered Perspective

PURE NOISE

Kentucky hardcore debutants bring the fun with the fury

It's clear from the opening spoken word title track that Inclination have a strong socio-political core. As if any further proof were needed, this Kentucky hardcore quintet confirm that you can have a social consciousness while remaining fun. Inclination deliver that in spades through the form of 90s metallic hardcore meshed with all the best bits of nu metal (the bounce, the guitar tones... not the rapping). Mosh-starters like *Predetermined* and *Marooned* are instant in their appeal, with chunky riffs and tasteful breakdowns executed at will. Guitarist Isaac Hale's tenure with Knocked Loose might give Inclination a minor boost, but based on this impressive debut, it's one they richly deserve.

FOR FANS OF: Knocked Loose, Jesus Piece, Refused

REMFRY DEDMAN



THE LOVECRAFT SEXTET

Miserere

DEBEMUR MORTI PRODUCTIONS

A blackened, jazz-noir elegy for the doomed and the damned

For his dankest, doomiest dive yet into the cavernous realms of fiendish jazz-noir, highly prolific composer Jason Köhnen rustles up an epic ode to repentance. The mood here is suitably sombre and unapologetically dramatic

for a work built on such firm biblical foundations, with affecting organ drones and Colin Webster's blurring sax sickness substituting for a paucity of overt guitar action. Shuffling percussive backbeats insinuate sneers of blackened menace amid the surging fug, while an embittered gargoyle pops out of his subterranean hidey-hole just long enough to mock the contrite with his accursed utterances. Amid the slow-motion seethe, Lilian Tong's heart-stopping soprano offers the wayward penitent some succour, like an acute case of a flagellant's whiplash salved in the radiant light of a Zbigniew Preisner film score.

FOR FANS OF: Bohren & Der Club Of Gore, The Kilimanjaro Darkjazz Ensemble, Sunn O)))

SPENCER GRADY



MOONSPELL

From Down Below - Live 80 Meters Deep

NAPALM

Portugal's dark metal ambassadors return to the underground

Moonspell took 25 years to release a proper live album: 2018's three-concert set, *Lisboa Under The Spell*. Just four years on, here's another onstage memento, consisting of last year's spellbinding prog odyssey *Hermitage* performed in its entirety in a Portuguese cave. The chilly subterranean ambience proves perfect for these elegant, shimmering tunes, making it plausibly Moonspell's best-sounding record, the tastefully wrought and emotive material really coming alive among the limestone stalactites. Even so, it is hard to get that excited

about a live album that replicates a studio album from a year ago with no extra classics or rarities. *From Down Below* ultimately feels more like a bonus disc from a deluxe reissue trying to go it alone as a viable commodity. However, with such an unorthodox and spectacular venue, the DVD is your best bet.

FOR FANS OF: Paradise Lost, Katatonia, Pink Floyd

CHRIS CHANTLER



NO RETURN

Requiem

MIGHTY MUSIC

French thrash metal's old guard tumble into apathy

No Return's debut album was called *Psychological Torment* and it was bloody great. Cramming black, groove and death metal into the thrash mould, it should have marked the start of a pioneering career. However, 32 years later, guitarist Alain Clément is the only member left, and the band he's amassed around himself have slumped into the generic melodeath doldrums. If this were a review of the founder's chops alone, *Requiem* would steal a 10, as he flexes his fingers past countless players' breaking points. However, framing such athleticism are songs that pack all the melodic prowess of two foxes fucking. Every entry's painted by numbers, except finale *The Black Wolfs Kingdom* (sic), which tries to upend the album's formula with its scope but simply gargles along for seven minutes. Guitar geeks, give this a spin. Everyone else should just whack At The Gates on instead.

FOR FANS OF: Testament, The Haunted, Carnal Forge

MATT MILLS

Lacuna Coil: hooked on classics



LACUNA COIL

Comalies XX

CENTURY MEDIA

Milan's gothic metal mavens reconstruct their landmark album

LACUNA COIL'S

HYBRID of goth, groove and alternative has thrust the Milan outfit towards the upper echelons of modern metal. Spearheaded by co-vocalists Cristina Scabbia and Andrea Ferro, the band had become synonymous with rich, haunting instrumentation by the early 00s as a result of two transfixing albums, *In A Reverie* and *Unleashed Memories*. But it was 2002's *Comalies* that set a benchmark, not only for the band, but for gothic-tinged metal as a whole. And despite tapping into an immersive amalgam of past sounds and unexplored territories on subsequent releases, Lacuna Coil's third album arguably remains their anthem-laden masterstroke to date.

The MO of *Comalies XX* is to revisit and revamp these songs two decades later. The most noticeable element of "deconstruction" comes in the stripping back of programming and synths. The lyrics on *Swamped* and quintessential belter *Heaven's A Lie* are more discernible with key changes and additional vocal flourishes, extended guitar solos and Andrea's growls packing a marked aggressiveness in their delivery. There remains an incredible sense of atmosphere at play as *Aeon* – its disquieting ambience backed by Cristina's hypnotic cleans – segues into a menacing *Tight Rope* on steroids. Heavier arrangements collide with oppressive soundscapes as it unfurls like a Dario Argento movie soundtrack amidst unsettling keys and vitriolic screams.

While Cristina is at her crystalline best, there are moments – such as *Entwined*, and *Angel's Punishment* – where that spine-tingling feeling of the OG material is lost due to the atmospheric nuances being eclipsed by a more modern rock mix. Diehards may blanch at the makeover of such a sumptuously ethereal record, but overall these 13 tracks are re-dressed and, to quote Cristina, sounding "fucking slick in 2022".

FOR FANS OF: Within Temptation, In This Moment, Infected Rain

SOPHIE MAUGHAN





Lorna Shore prepare to ascend to the next level

LORNA SHORE

Pain Remains

CENTURY MEDIA

New Jersey's symphonic deathcore heirs apparent go fourth and conquer

A CHANGE IN personnel can have huge ramifications for a band; Lorna Shore have reaped the rewards and then some. Since dynamic frontman Will Ramos joined in late 2019, the New Jersey deathcore quintet have burst into the metal spotlight thanks to last year's stunning EP, *...And I Return To Nothingness*, a monolithic live presence – those who attended this year's Bloodstock can attest to such a thing – and a bit of help from a viral video showcasing a medical examination of the singer's vocal cords. Now, though, it's back to letting their music do the talking. Fourth album *Pain Remains* is their most ambitious to date, over an hour in length, and, given the last three years, arriving with sky-high anticipation.

However, once opening track *Welcome Back, O Sleeping Dreamer* explodes into life following 90 seconds of grandiose, choral build-up, what follows is an extreme metal rollercoaster, hurtling at breakneck speed until the very end. The three previously released singles – *Into The Earth*, *Sun//Eater* and *Cursed To Die* – segue into one another beautifully, making much more sense in the context of the album, and *Apotheosis* takes the bombastic orchestrations of Dimmu Borgir and Cradle Of Filth, and marries them expertly with blastbeats and breakdowns.

In line with Lorna Shore's boldness on this album, though, the final 20 minutes is handed over to the title track, split into a trilogy of movements. *I: Dancing Like Flames* is a steadier metalcore number in line with modern-day Parkway Drive. *II: After All I've Done, I'll Disappear* begins by following suit and then evolves into an all-out deathcore assault, which is where the nine-minute long *III: In A Sea Of Fire* picks up, following a brief reprise of strings, and powers the record through to its conclusion. Lorna Shore have been audacious and daring in the composing of *Pain Remains*, and it's paid off handsomely.

FOR FANS OF: Parkway Drive, Shadow Of Intent, Slaughter To Prevail

ELLIOT LEAVER



NO SUN

In The Interim

CHURCH ROAD

The shoegaze and metal worlds hold another communion

So many metal labels are currently adopting bands that are exclusively inspired by late 80s and early 90s-era Creation Records artists, such as My Bloody Valentine or The Jesus And Mary Chain, that it makes you wonder why there was so much grumbling between indie and metal fans back in the day. Evidently, we've got more in common than we think, and an album like *In The Interim* provides plenty of proof. It may be a dreamy, melodious listen, but it has the necessary heft, weight and a fuzzy, raw guitar tone that fans of heavy music will adore. This very memorable set of songs amounts to an excellent album, whatever your musical tribe.

FOR FANS OF: My Bloody Valentine, Slow Crush, Swervedriver

STEPHEN HILL



NOCTEM

Credo Certe Ne Cras

MNRK HEAVY

Iberian folk/black metal veterans can't keep their balance

Noctem claim to be pioneers of fusing black metal with "Spanish-style nylon-string guitars". The problem is that, over 20 years, the Iberian quintet have always kept their extreme music and flamenco melodies separate. Any folk leanings never see more than the

odd segue, and their sixth album does little to disrupt that trend. The title track opens with an acoustic arpeggio then recreates it on electric guitar; *The Pale Moon Rite* interrupts itself with jangling string work and... no, that's it. *I Am Alpha* and *Homilia Of Punishment* pack some pummelling breakdowns, but they can't exhilarate half as hard as the rampages of Gaerea and Watain. Although 'flamenco black metal' is a novel idea, the formula's still far from perfect.

FOR FANS OF: Gaerea, Gorgoroth, Watain

MATT MILLS



NOTHING MORE

Spirits

BETTER NOISE MUSIC

Texan arena-ready rockers hold on to a handful of grit

In their native USA, Nothing More are rock royalty. The Texan quartet, led by peacocking frontman Jonny Hawkins, are critically acclaimed Grammy winners who regularly play large venues. In the UK, their stock is still on the rise. The band's sixth album should go some way to bridging the gap. It's chock-full of catchy, bouncy rock anthems like *Tired Of Winning* and the pop-punk-indebted *The Other F Word*, with plenty of buzzy riffs and chest-beating choruses that are aimed squarely at arena territory. This is rock music for a mainstream audience, yet there's a razor-sharp grit to *Dream With Me* and *Valhalla (Too Young To See)* that ensures *Spirits* isn't too squeaky clean.

FOR FANS OF: Royal Blood, Linkin Park, Muse

DANNII LEIVERS

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe



DIABOLICAL RAW

Elegy Of Fire Dusk

BASE RECORD PRODUCTION

Revitalised after a 12-year hiatus, this Turkish duo combine grandiose symphonic BM with a grim tale of split personalities and serial murder to craft an ambitious and eviscerating experience.

FOR FANS OF: Dark Funeral, Behemoth, Vader

TOM O'BOYLE



INHUMAN DEPRAVITY

The Experiment Dead

GRUESOME

Like most Turkish death squads, Inhuman Depravity wear their influences conspicuously. Here at least, they've tweaked their 90s brutal Dutch death metal sources to reveal a personality of their own.

FOR FANS OF: Vader, Dark Funeral, Behemoth

OLIVIER BADIN



VOIDOATH

Ascension Beyond Kokytus

CURSED MONK

This Costa Rican quartet's doom-death debut gradually plumbs desolate depths. Coming across like Winter with High On Fire's rhythm section, Voidoath's thunderous black smog becomes truly enveloping.

FOR FANS OF: High On Fire, Winter, High On Fire

KEZ WHELAN



OBSIDIOUS

Iconic

SEASON OF MIST

Ex-*Obscura* members reach for tech-death domination

Calling your debut album *Iconic* takes balls as big as boulders, but Obsidious might one day prove worthy. Formed by bassist Linus Klausenitzer, guitarist Rafael Trujillo and drummer Sebastian Lanser after their split from *Obscura*, the band retain the nonstop noodling of their old day job. Opener *Under Black Skies* baffles like a chess match with Stephen Hawking. Frontman Javi Perera's vocals soar so high they wedge *Iron & Dust* midway between tech and NWOBHM bombast, while his growls are filthier than a serial killer's basement. The odd groove metal riff is another dynamic stroke in this quartet's canon. Although similarly melodic virtuosity from peers like *Persefone* means they're not unique yet, time could make Obsidious a name worth knowing.



FOR FANS OF: *Persefone*, *Allegaeon*, *Meshuggah*

MATT MILLS



KARIN PARK

Private Collection

PELAGIC

Scandi polymath reworks her apocalyptic pop into a state of grace

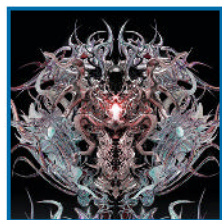
Karin Park is one of those enviable creatives who can turn their hand to just about anything. She's an actor, a Eurovision hit-penning songwriter, a model and a member of Norway's mighty *Årabrot*.

Most notably, though, she's a significant solo artist whose dark, spidery, industrialised pop manages to prick the nape while setting feet to tap. *Private Collection* sees her deconstructing and reimagining some of her favourite songs to showcase the artist she is now. Despite spanning 20 years, the collection hangs together as a unified whole, with older material nestling neatly alongside the album's sole new track, *Traces Of Me*. Karin's voice suggests everyone from Björk and Marissa Nadler to a gothier *Tori Amos* – ghostly and evocative, and perfectly complemented by looming organ tones, cello, guitar and synths.



FOR FANS OF: *Lustmord*, *A.A. Williams*, *Nicole Sabouné*

ALEX DELLER



POLYPHIA

Remember That You Will Die

RISE

Texan show-offs continue to push boundaries and buttons

In an age populated by absurdly virtuosic musicians, it takes a band like Polyphia to really stand out with their fiddly fusion of genres. The opening instrumentals see guitarists Tim Henson and Scott LePage conjure a repertoire of knotty noodling and unperturbed strumming around the intricate polyrhythms of Clay Goeber and Clay Aeschliman. The more striking middle portion sees rappers Sophia Black, Killstation and \$not headlining the band's wickedly inventive, if jarring, collision of hip hop, progressive rock and jazz. Though understandably gaudy for many, the sheer imagination on display is

what makes the quartet so distinguishable. More palatable is the final instalment: a Chino Moreno-helmed *Bloodbath* and Steve Vai's appearance on *Ego Death* that ends in a flurry of notes and a blessing from a pioneering prodigy to the next generation of fret-wizards.



FOR FANS OF: *Animals As Leaders*, *Plini*, *Intervals*

ADAM BRENNAN



PSYCHONAUT

Violate Consensus Reality

PELAGIC

Belgian prog-sludge trio seek out a state of harmony

While Psychonaut speak of wholesale leaps of thought or evolution, their own journey seems more incremental. Rather than bursting out of a sticky larval state, *Violate Consensus Reality* sees them extending a tentative feeler, thickening their sound and shucking off some of the more jarring elements so as to better reroute your brain. Thundering prog-sludge – think *Isis*, *Kyuss* and *Baroness* colliding – is still the main event, but hypnotic, Arvo Pärt-esque piano and guest vocals from members of *Brutus* and *Amenra* help the band better direct the beams of rainbow-coloured light they use to slice through all the megalithic heaviness. Here they explore the notion that humanity could slough off its destructive self-absorption to find harmony as part of a greater whole – a lofty premise given the world's dumpster fire status, but fingers crossed they could be right.



FOR FANS OF: *East Of The Wall*, *Ufomammut*, *Torche*

ALEX DELLER



The Otolith offer a newfound sense of gravity

THE OTOLITH

Folium Limina

BLUES FUNERAL RECORDINGS

Former *Subrosa* members reunite to heal a wounded world

IT'S UNFASHIONABLE

FOR a band to quit while they're ahead. However, enigmatic Salt Lake City quintet *Subrosa* had only just become the darlings of the doom scene with their fourth album, stellar dystopian arthouse dirge *For This We Fought The Battle Of Ages*, when they disbanded in 2019. That final LP remains a radiant masterpiece of cryptic slow'n'low intensity that continues to compel immersion. But although *Subrosa*'s creative chemistry was cut off in its prime, the impact of their loss is significantly softened with the six-track, 63-minute debut from *The Otolith*.

Here we find not only *Subrosa*'s well-bonded rhythm section, bassist/guitarist Matt Brotherton and drummer Andy Patterson, but crucially also Sarah Pendleton and Kim Cordray – the twin violinists who provide both bands with their most intoxicating *modus operandi*. Violins have a long and noble history of augmenting gloomy atmospherics in metal, from the ornate flourishes of *Black Sabbath's Spiral Architect*, through the off-kilter dramatics of *Celtic Frost's Rex Irae (Requiem)*, to the stately heartbreak of *My Dying Bride's Turn Loose The Swans*. The Pendleton/Cordray tag team, however, provide pretty much the last word in sumptuous doom fiddle, the duelling catguts entwined in eerie sync.

Perhaps on *Folium Limina* the rhythmic sense is a little sharper and more playful, the tempos more varied, the wall of sound a touch more uplifting. The *Otolith* are audibly keen to embrace some strongly iconic resonances. Beguiling opener *Sing No Coda* leads us in with the familiar sound of a distant tolling bell, while *Bone Dust* brilliantly sets *Charlie Chaplin's* closing speech from *The Great Dictator* to a choppy, heads-down riff jam. The impassioned plea for unity and tolerance perpetually relevant after 80-odd years, sounding more powerful than ever over a ton of hypnotic, head-caving fuzz chords.



FOR FANS OF: *Neurosis*, *Jex Thoth*, *Electric Wizard*

CHRIS CHANTLER





SKID ROW

The Gang's All Here

EARMUSIC

New Jersey's hard rock legends find themselves back on the upswing

HISTORY HAS BEEN neither kind nor fair to Skid Row. Written off as hair metal refugees, Skid Row's acrimonious 1996 split with vocalist Sebastian Bach, for many, spelled the end of the band's relevance. In fact, Skid Row are metal's great unsung heroes. They became the first metal band in history to debut at No.1 on the Billboard chart with 1991's *Slave To The Grind*, and they've since left all of their hair metal contemporaries in the dust with something heavier and intrinsically darker. After decades of tinkering with that formula, they have, at long last, found their way home.

Skid Row's latest effort marks a triumphant return to form, a thundering klaxon ringing out mightily on opener *Hell Or High Water* and *Not Dead Yet*. From stem to stern, it's a steady battering of revved-up tempos, sleazy riffs and endless fist-in-the-air, 'Fuck yeah!' vibes. Guitarists Dave 'The Snake' Sabo and Scotti Hill tap back into their nasty, dual-fretted grooving on *Resurrected* and *When The Lights Come On*, and new vocalist Erik Grönwall – a fiery young

Swede, formerly of H.E.A.T and with cavernous pipes – proves an inspired addition. Sounding very much like a certain flaxen-haired ex-vocalist, his glass-breaking roar on the title track extinguishes any doubts as to his bona fides.



Time Bomb and *Tear It Down* showcase Skid Row's elite rhythm section – the greasy basslines of Rachel Bolan locked into the percussive squall of drummer Rob Hammersmith. At times, as on middling power ballad *October's Song*, the material borders on trite, and tracks like *World On Fire* get a little heavy-handed with overweening handwringing over the perilous state of the world, but you're not looking for the meaning of life in a Skid Row song – you're looking for some high-octane heavy metal escapism, blasted at maximum volume. With *The Gang's All Here*, they don't quite reach *Slave...* levels of mastery, but they come pretty damned close.



FOR FANS OF: Airbourne, Five Finger Death Punch, Pantera

JOE DALY



RAVEN

Leave 'Em Bleeding

STEAMHAMMER

A blistering ragbag from veteran Geordie speed freaks

An unapologetic, pre-tour stopgap release, *Leave 'Em Bleeding* brings together a handful of songs from Raven's last two studio albums, 2015's *Exterminator* and 2020's *Metal City*, with a helping of rarities, live tracks and covers. Quite how the Geordie trio have kept their energy levels up for the best part of 50 years is anyone's guess, but recent songs like *Top Of The Mountain* and *Destroy All Monsters* are very nearly as manic as their early 80s classics. Squarely aimed at the diehards, the remaining tracks range from predictably psychotic live versions of *Crash Bang Wallop* and the rarely played *Stay Hard*, to a brutal sprint through Montrose's *Space Station #5* and the sinew-straining speed metal of the previously unreleased *Malice In Geordieland*.



FOR FANS OF: Motörhead, Venom, Satan

DOM LAWSON



RAZOR

Cycle Of Contempt

RELAPSE

Canada's thrash assailants keep the blows landing

With a slew of albums in the 80s, Canuck crushers Razor wrote the book on subtlety in metal. It was called 'Fuck Off With That Shit' and came with a free kick in the balls. Still, 39 years in they have must have mellowed a bit, right?

Off My Meds, First Rate Hate and Punch Your Face In? Maybe not, then. There are no surprises here, just angry, crunchy thrash with plenty of fire and drums straight out of the blacksmith-with-a-hump school of attack; imagine Exodus punching a moose. Razor haven't so much embraced maturity as put it in a chokehold. *Cycle Of Contempt* is metal for people who wear barbed wire underwear.



FOR FANS OF: Exodus, Onslaught, Kreator

ALASTAIR RIDDELL



RUBY THE HATCHET

Fear Is A Cruel Master

MAGNETIC EYE

Occult-infused rockers dial down on the glamour

Philadelphia-dwelling five-piece Ruby The Hatchet got a bit of flack for adding to the already bulging crop of 70s-loving, occult-obsessed bands, but their three albums so far have elevated them beyond copycat status. Somewhere between Blood Ceremony and Yes, 2017's *Planetary Space Child* sparked with space-age witchiness, while earlier cuts were set to a doom-spangled soundtrack. The band says they've grown up on album four, and that maturity manifests itself in a set of songs that are rockier and without the overtly psychedelic frills. Jillian Taylor's vocals – much more at the forefront this time – glide over well-balanced guitar and organ, but with less doom and psych to fall back on, *Fear Is A Cruel Master* exposes Ruby The Hatchet's middling compositions.



FOR FANS OF: Blood Ceremony, Orchid, Lucifer

HOLLY WRIGHT



Born Demon

Norse mystic rockers strip it back for the Devil

Previously a band with a somewhat fluid identity, Sahg have undergone a wholesale reinvention. Now a three-piece, the Norwegians have taken a bold leap of faith and fully embraced a doomy, witch-bothered old-school metal sound. The end result is their best album by a huge margin. *Born Demon* sounds magnificent – the analogue spirit of 70s rock, underpinned by a very modern sense of bombast – but it's an overall atmosphere of rabid riff evangelism that enshrouds occult yarns like the woozy, sinister title track and the grandiose *Descendants Of The Devil* that sets this apart from Sahg's earlier efforts. Built using a seemingly never-ending supply of fantastic riffs, the likes of *Black Cross On The Moon*, *Evil Immortal* and the outrageously catchy *Heksedans* are proof that getting back to spooky basics has been Sahg's greatest moment of revelation.

FOR FANS OF: Uncle Acid & The Deadbeats, Green Lung, Spirit Adrift



Umbra Mortis

Symphonic deathcore crew find some traction amongst the tedium

Symphonic deathcore is in the spotlight of late, thanks in large part to Lorna Shore

vocalist Will Ramos going viral with his inhuman howls and internal organs. These Londoners might not pack the same vocal tricks, but what *Umbra Mortis* lacks in virality it makes up for with catchy beatdowns among haunting orchestral flourishes. It's not all hits; opener *Nine's* attempt at atmosphere falls flat, and there are some particularly tedious slams too. But for every uninspired chug, there are moments like the charging opening to *The Rats In The Walls* or Valis Volkova's melodic vocal standouts, as on the title track and *Eulogy. Of Blood And Bone* treads overly familiar ground in its tiresome riffing and gutturals, but closer *The Serpent*, where a curb-stomping beginning gives way to eerie strings and blastbeats, ends the album on a high.

FOR FANS OF: Lorna Shore, Cradle Of Filth, Enterprise Earth



Acoustic Adventures

ATOMIC FIRE

Finnish power metallurgs return to the bombast-free zone

Following their first volume of acoustic reimaginings in January (though why it couldn't have been a double album is anyone's guess), the Finnish power metal popsters here cherry-pick another 12 songs from their 10-album back catalogue and strip them down for the unplugged treatment. Once again, much work has been done to convincingly transpose these tunes onto pianos, flamenco guitars, banjo, Hammond organ and wire-brushes, and it works a treat – if you can stomach the slightly

mawkish, twee Radio 2ness of it all. Even their biggest fan would concede that Sonata Arctica's brand of heavy metal has never been the most rugged or raucous. Their strongest suits are the pop-savvy songwriting and the emotive force of Tony Kakko's voice and lyrics, so these quieter, softer, more sensitive rearrangements arguably find many of these songs in their optimum forms.

FOR FANS OF: Scorpions
Acoustica, Status Quo
Aquostic, Helloween
Unarmed



Sacred Rites

& Black Magick
NAPALM

High-end black metal from the frozen wastes of... Missouri

The word 'epic' gets thrown around a lot, but sometimes it's actually fitting. Stormruler hail from Missouri, but their spiritual home is Sweden circa 1995 and their take on black metal is suitably grandiose and ambitious – all icy lakes in vast valleys, dragons and so on. Think *Dissection* and *Dawn*: scathing but melodic, and downright evil-sounding in places. There are 10 songs here, and each one has a separate instrumental piece to accompany it. Someone has been very busy. The songwriting, playing and production is all top-notch without sounding too polished or commercial. Like their fellow yanks Stormkeep, Stormruler manage to tread the line between black metal integrity and Euro festival headliner potential.

FOR FANS OF: *Dissection*,
Dawn, *Stormkeep*

ALASTAIR RIDDELL



SODOM

SPV / STEAMHAMMER

Teutonic thrash legends celebrate four decades of aggression

MIGHT have spun the

revolving door like a miniature circle-pit over the years, but Sodom have remained consistently ferocious. With guitarist Frank Blackfire back in the fold alongside mainstay and frontman Tom Angelripper, it's arguably their most interesting period in a while. So what better time to revisit the trail of carnage they've left in their wake since forming in the early 80s? They've chosen an interesting format to do so, re-recording one track from each of their major studio releases across the intervening decades. These are not reinventions; they follow pretty much the same arrangements, but with (mostly) improved playing and a razor-edged production.

The biggest changes are obviously in the earliest material. *Sepulchral Voice* from the debut EP has never sounded so ripped, but it does miss the chaotic messiness that once saw Mayhem founder Euronymous describe Sodom's works as "masterpieces of black stinking metal". The same goes for *After The Deluge* from debut full-length *Obsessed By Cruelty*, although it does tame the godawful snare drum of the original.

By the time they reach the thrashier evolution that Frank's arrival helped create, the concept really comes into its own. *Electrocution* and *Baptism Of Fire* from that classic period are objectively 'better' in that the playing is tighter and the production far sharper. It still sounds slightly wrong, though, like the remastered versions that have replaced many classic originals on the big streaming platforms. And, by the time you reach the modern era with *Caligula* from *Decision Day* and *Euthanasia* from 2020's *Genesis XIX*, there's little to choose between the originals and the re-recordings.

The overall results are very much a mixed bag, then, but there's no faulting either the source material or the delivery, and Sodom's four decades or so on the planet remain something that should rightly be celebrated.

FOR FANS OF: Destruction, Kreator, Dark Angel

PAUL TRAVERS





Wednesday 13 got out of his lockdown bunker mentality

WEDNESDAY 13

Horrier

NAPALM

Lexington's lord of horror finds his post-pandemic mojo

WEDNESDAY 13 HAS seemingly never been short of inspiration, but by his own admission, even this horror-obsessed frontman had a hard time summoning the creative spirits during the pandemic. So, he turned to his happy place – his home studio housing a mancave of horror memorabilia – and the result is *Horrier*. As implied with songs like *Exhume And Devour*, the time spent there did nothing but perk up his taste for blood. Most macabre of all, and ranking as one of the band's heaviest drops to date, is *Insides Out*, which opens with a bowel-trembling breakdown almost as terrifying as the idea of your innards on show. Wednesday's snarling pleas of 'Scream for me, bleed for me' offer a sludgier side to the normally sleazy mob making them sound more like Crowbar than frequenters of the Sunset Strip.

While it might not come as any surprise that the band have penned another bunch of songs about things that go bump in the night, *Horrier* plays to their versatility. It leaps from horrorpunk

sleaze – check out the W.A.S.P.-y *Halfway To The Grave* – to Southern tones on the whirring, Pantera-esque *Hell Is Coming*. *You're So Hideous* bundles all of the band's energy into a catchy ode to Medusa, while *Good Day To Be A Bad Guy* is a throwback to the *Fang Bang* days.

As usual, *Horrier* comes with a few morsels for the horror movie buff: the John Carpenter-inspired *Return To Haddonfield* – a nod to the movie *Halloween* – and industrial scarefest *Christine: Fury In The Night*, stripped from Stephen King's spooky tale. But while all these tracks tread familiar ground, it's the genuinely heart-wrenching *The Other Side* – Wednesday's personal ode to the sudden loss of his mother and Joey Jordison – that reveals a deeper side to the ex-Murderdolls. It may have started with a momentary lapse of inspiration, but *Horrier* is as thrilling as any of Wednesday's work to date.

FOR FANS OF: Alice Cooper, Mötley Crüe, Misfits

HOLLY WRIGHT



THERION

Leviathan II

NUCLEAR BLAST

Symphonic Swedes keep out of the indulgence red zone

Sweden's pioneering symphonic metal collective have rolled many curveballs over a 35-year career, but no balls were ever curvier than 2018's three-hour concept set, *Beloved Antichrist*. The lockdown-spawned *Leviathan* albums appear to be a concerted corrective, and if you've got the songs, playing it safe can pay off. *Lucifuge Rofocale* is a crafty blast, all spiky prog-thrash riffs and florid atmospherics, while *Midnight Star* is head-down theatrical HM with mournful monastic choral work. If 2021's *Leviathan* was a return to form, *II* contains some of Therion's meatiest metal in years.

FOR FANS OF: Nightwish, Amorphis, King Diamond

CHRIS CHANTLER



VORBID

A Swan By The Edge Of Mandala

INDIE RECORDINGS

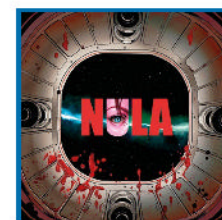
Norwegian four-piece dive deeper down the prog-thrash wormhole

After earning some acclaim for their thrash attack on 2018's *Mind*, Vorbid set sail for proggy pastures on album number two. Drawing influence from Genesis's seminal *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* and emboldened by producer Endre Kirkesola, the Norwegian quartet's latest is a meticulously crafted concept album about fear and isolation. Frontman

Michael Eriksen Briggs wisely trades his high-pitched shriek for a gruffer approach throughout, while peppering in some Maynard-ish clean vocals during likes of *Union*, and elsewhere they flirt with filthy sax solos on *Self* and Living Colour-esque funk on *Ex Ante*. A big leap forward in both sound and vision, *A Swan By The Edge Of Mandala* sees Vorbid spread their musical wings and reach exciting new heights.

FOR FANS OF: Voivod, Sikkth, Tool

EDWIN McFEE



VUKOVI

Nula

LAB

Scottish electrocore hi-risers bring their sci-fi concept close to home

2020's *Fall Better* cemented Vukovi's status as purveyors of innovative, heavy pop-rock. Now the Scottish duo are back with an ambitious concept album. *Nula* is all sci-fi soundscapes dense with synthesisers and weighty riffs, painting a vivid backdrop of the dystopian world the titular alien character is being held captive in, and brought to life through Janine Shilstone's gorgeous power-pop vocal. Tracks like *SLO* and *I Exist* ground the concept with very relatable problems of mental illness and trauma coming through as *Nula* fights for emancipation in this strange world. The songs themselves are glossy, heavy and full of addictive hooks. *Hades* is a standout, and with many barely scraping the three-minute mark, it's a record that begs to be instantly replayed once it's over.

FOR FANS OF: Pvriss, Twin Atlantic, Halfones

CATHERINE MORRIS



A WAKE IN PROVIDENCE

Eternity

UNIQUE LEADER

Symphonic deathcore troupe experience the highs and the lows

No strangers to the merger of deathcore and symphonic bombast, A Wake In Providence's arrival on Unique Leader sees a shift from the more guttural aspects of the former and into the latter's more opulent realms. Guitarists D'Andre Tyre and Jordan Felion wrap strings and choirs around their frantic and incisive riffs. But on the likes of the blackened *We Are Eternity* and *The Court Ov The Trinity*, the added bells and whistles are given the space needed for the grandiose effect. However, what goes up must come down, which the band achieve with gleeful aplomb as *The Hunt Ov The Wraith* and *Siamo Legati Dal Terrore* hurtle back down to earth. While the band count Lorna Shore's Will Ramos among its alumni, Adam Mercer adeptly shows off his own vocal versatility as he mixes cleans with screams and gurgles.

FOR FANS OF: *Make Them Suffer*, *Shadow Of Intent*, *Lorna Shore*

ADAM BRENNAN



WE CAME AS ROMANS
Darkbloom

SHARPTONE

Michigan's metalcore quintet find the path back from tragedy

This Michigan metalcore band's sixth studio album is their first since the sudden

passing of clean vocalist Kyle Pavone in 2018. It is clear that this emotional weight hangs over the album, and it makes the calmer moments even more poignant, particularly with midpoint ballad *One More Day*. This is a strikingly gentle track but, as with *Holding The Embers*, it grows more memorable with each listen. Other standouts like *Plagued*, *Doublespeak* and *Darkbloom*, which has some strong Linkin Park vibes, see the band take a heavier turn. This, combined with the determined optimism and confidence running throughout the album, prove particularly effective. There are some impressive guest appearances courtesy of rapper Zero 9:36 in *Daggers* and Caleb Shomo in *Black Hole*, but it's Dave Stephens' clean vocals that take centre stage, doing Kyle great justice.

FOR FANS OF: Of Mice & Men, Linkin Park Miss May I

NIK YOUNG

CHARLOTTE WESSELS
Tales From Six Feet Under
Vol. II

NAPALM

Netherlands' symphonic songstress doubles down

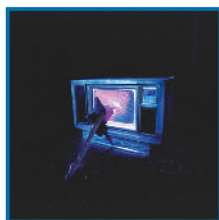
Charlotte Wessels has become a veteran of the lockdown record. The feat of writing a song a month for the past two years has certainly done wonders to sharpen the ex-Delain frontwoman's skills. Much like the first *Tales From Six Feet Under* – a compilation of a year's worth of these self-produced tracks – *Vol II* is an accomplished and eclectic exercise in song-writing. Experimenting with genres, she has a knack for gorgeous, poppy earworms like *The Final*

Roadtrip, while *Human To Ruin* and *The Phantom Touch* are full-blown metal and showcase a more powerful side to Charlotte's sweet voice. On the sharp-tongued *Toxic* she takes a less-is-more approach to instrumentation to create heaviness in new ways, and it's excellent. All that's missing is a real live band and instruments to do her songs justice.



FOR FANS OF: Delain,
Within Temptation,
The Gathering

CATHERINE MORRIS



WILLOW

<Coping Mechanism>

MSFTSMUSIC / ROC NATION / POLYDOR

Los Angeles' star-powered singer goes it alone

Willow's previous music was defined by collaboration. Enlisting pop punk royalty like Travis Barker and Avril Lavigne, it seemed she wasn't yet comfortable in her new rock star persona. With her fifth solo full-length, collaborations are few and far between, and Willow sounds much the better for it. Whilst opener *<Maybe> It's My Fault* includes questionable nu metal tinges, Willow's vocals sound flawlessly agile in both the title track and *Curious/Furious*, bringing in a newfound, nuanced sense of complexity that becomes a trait throughout the record. This isn't a perfect album – *Hover Like A Goddess* is overly indebted to Hayley Williams and closer *Batshit* offers a nod to previous material – but Willow has more than proven herself as a rocker able to stand on her own.

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

FOR FANS OF: Mint Green, Sasami, Mannequin Pussy

ROSIE ESTHER SOLOMON



RESURRECTIONS

Unearthing the latest metal reissues

FORGED AMID THE ashes of a failed Fields Of The Nephilim reunion, **NFD** have become a well-respected force in gothic rock circles, and *Requiem From The Abyss* (Jungle) [7] explains why. From driving Neff-a-like anthems like *Light My Way* and *Turbine (Nothing Lasts Forever)* through to the more esoteric, atmospheric likes of *Stronger* and *Never Let This Die*, it's an opulent retrospective, designed to scratch that quintessential goth itch.

Similarly opulent and shadow-bound, Swedish veterans **THERION**'s imperious late 90s/early 00s run of albums is receiving a long overdue touch-up. 1996's *Theli* (Hammerheart) [8] is the pick of the bunch, primarily because it signalled the band's bold plunge into more theatrical, symphonic waters; while 2001's *Secret Of The Runes* [8] is a must-have for fans of operatic clangour and widescreen mysticism.

DIAMOND HEAD's legendary 1980 debut, *Lightning To The Nations* (Silver Lining) [9], has been reissued many times before, but it might just be worth buying once more. Newly remastered and blessed with previously unheard alternate mixes of classics like *Am I Evil?* and *The Prince*, along with seven bonus tracks, this feels definitive and, as you might expect, rocks like an absolute cunt. Out of print for aeons, **ENTOMBED's** 2001 opus *Morning Star* (Threeman) [8] is back on all formats and still liable to kick your head in. Listen to bone-wrenching bangers like *Chief Rebel Angel* and *I For An Eye* and wonder why the Swedes weren't much, much bigger at the turn of the century. **TROUBLE's** 2013 comeback *The Distortion Field* (Hammerheart) [7] was never going to be hailed as equal to *Psalm 9* or *The Skull*, but thanks to Kyle Thomas's bellicose vocal performance and a great number of magnificent riffs, it remains an impressive, doom-drenched rebirth.

One of the UK's best responses to the oncoming grunge storm, **HEADSWIM**'s 1994 debut *Flood* (Trapped Animal) [8] still stands up remarkably well. Spiky, gently psychedelic and often ferociously heavy, songs like *Gone To Pot* and *Try Disappointed* rode the Nirvana-led zeitgeist with great ingenuity and giant, pendulous cojones. In fact, most grunge was nowhere near this good.

DOM LAWSON

LIVE REVIEWS

TAYLOR HAWKINS
TRIBUTE CONCERT

WEMBLEY STADIUM, LONDON

Grief and gratitude collide in a star-studded send-off for Foo Fighters' beloved drummer

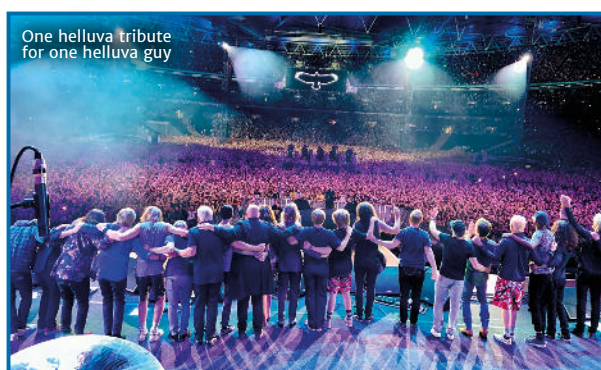
"A GIGANTIC FUCKING night for a gigantic fucking person."

The loss of Taylor Hawkins in March this year shocked the rock world, and emotions are running high even before Dave Grohl pays tribute to his fallen friend today. Dave might be the nicest man in rock, but it was Taylor's spirited presence behind the kit and seemingly unwavering smile that helped cement the idea that Foo Fighters are rock's most likeable band.

Ninety thousand rock fans have turned out at Wembley Stadium for an all-star tribute to the drummer, pouring through the gates in the early afternoon to settle in for six hours of celebration, commiseration and every emotion in between. It's been 15 years since Wembley last hosted such an ambitious crossover event – 2007's Live Earth even featuring Foo Fighters alongside the likes of Beastie Boys and Metallica, among others – but the Taylor Hawkins Tribute Concert feels like it transcends all that came before.

And it starts with a flood of tears. **FOO FIGHTERS** step out to a tsunami of support and cheers, yet the sheer emotional weight of seeing Dave Grohl barely holding it together as he gives a commencement speech is almost too much. But for all the emotional turmoil, there is a kernel of triumph and celebration that remains firm. **LIAM GALLAGHER** joins the Foos to kick off the musical programming with an Oasis double-header, *Rock 'n' Roll Star* and a poignant *Live Forever* getting the crowd singing along en masse.

From there, it's a seemingly impossible procession of increasingly impressive cameos. **NILE RODGERS**, **STEWART COPELAND**, **SAM RYDER** – a star-studded assemblage that goes beyond the realms of rock alone. Pop singer **KESHA** jumps on for a genuinely unhinged *Children Of The Revolution*, swinging the mic like a lasso, crawling



One helluva tribute for one helluva guy

THE FOOS

Dave Grohl
Pat Smear
Chris Shiflett
Nate Mendel
Rami Jaffee

WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

Alain Johannes
Alex Lifeson
Brian Johnson
Brian May
Chevy Chase
Chris Chaney
Chrissie Hynde
Dave Chappelle
Geddy Lee
Greg Kurstin
James Gang
Jason Falkner
Jason Sudeikis
Josh Freese
Justin Hawkins
Kesha
Lars Ulrich
Liam Gallagher
Luke Spiller
Mark Ronson
Nandi Bushell
Nile Rodgers
Omar Hakim
Paul McCartney
Pretenders
Roger Taylor
Rufus Taylor
Sam Ryder
Shane Hawkins
Stewart Copeland
Supergrass
The Coattail Riders
Them Crooked Vultures
Travis Barker
Violet Grohl
Wolfgang Van Halen

across the stage and at one point half-swallowing the mic. Comedian **DAVE CHAPPELLE** and Hollywood actor **JASON SUDEIKIS** join in to pay tribute to Taylor's accomplishments, but also to who he was as a person.

The celebratory mood also encompasses other fallen icons; Nile Rodgers leads lively renditions of David Bowie's *Let's Dance* and *Modern Love*. Later, **WOLFGANG VAN HALEN** showcases his shredding skills on *Hot For Teacher* in tribute to his dad, while one of the many drumkits onstage features the visage of recently deceased *Grease* star Olivia Newton-John. One segment even sees **VIOLET GROHL** belting out beautiful renditions of Jeff Buckley's *Last Goodbye* and *Grace*, showing she may have inherited her dad's rock star genes.

Therein lies the beauty of this event. While it's been organised to pay tribute to Taylor Hawkins, it also serves as a celebration of music itself. Whether it's **SUPERGRASS**, **PRETENDERS** or Taylor's own covers band, **CHEVY METAL**, every single guest and song is met with a rapture of excitement and thankfulness. It's especially gratifying seeing **BRIAN JOHNSON** joined by **LARS ULRICH**, *Back In Black* seeing Brian trade vocals with Justin Hawkins before absolutely knocking the walls down on *Let There Be Rock* six years since he last played with AC/DC.

That's to say nothing of the reunions. **THEM CROOKED VULTURES** return after a decade away with a cover of Elton John's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*. **JAMES GANG** make a surprise appearance ahead of their final reunion show in November. Perhaps biggest of all is the appearance of **RUSH** survivors Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson, who drop the overture of *2112* with Dave Grohl behind the kit before playing *Working Man* and *YYZ*. Truly, never to be repeated.

The emotional crescendo hits as night descends. Thirty years since he hosted a similar event in tribute to Freddie Mercury, **BRIAN MAY** returns to Wembley for a stunning run-through of Queen hits starting with *We Will Rock You* and ending with a solo acoustic *Love Of My Life*. Just when you think it can't get any more moving, Dave Grohl returns and starts his own solo rendition of *Times Like These*, openly weeping as he plays. At that point the magnitude, the magic and the sheer catharsis of the evening comes crashing home. Even **PAUL MCCARTNEY** dropping *Oh! Darling* and *Helter Skelter* can't top the sheer significance of what the Foo Fighters achieve with their closing set, the entire stadium united in grief and gratitude for the music we all love.

The Foos absolutely storm the gates on the likes of *Monkey Wrench*, *These Days* and *My Hero* – joined by Taylor's son, Shane Hawkins, on drums – before Dave is left alone to close, playing solo on the most heart-wrenching rendition of *Everlong* you will ever hear. Tonight goes beyond a live show; it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience and a fitting send-off for a beloved, incandescent figure who touched so many lives, reminding us not only of what we have lost, but all that we still have to be grateful for.

RICH HOBSON

The remaining Foo Fighters, taking stock at the beginning of the six-hour memorial concert



Lars Ulrich: paying tribute to a fallen fellow sticksman



Brian and Justin: *Back In Black*. And pink



Father and daughter duo: Dave and Violet Grohl



Wolfgang Van Halen and Dave Grohl trade licks on *Hot For Teacher*




 Amon Amarth put Wembley to the torch

MACHINE HEAD / AMON AMARTH

THE HALO EFFECT

WEMBLEY ARENA, LONDON

WHOEVER THOUGHT WE

would see this again: Machine Head on a bill with other people? Since 2015, Robb Flynn's riffmaster generals have been heavy music's most isolationist band, eschewing festivals and support slots in favour of 'An Evening With...' extravaganzas. Between their secret set at Bloodstock this summer and this tour, the groove metal icons seem to be reopening their borders – and be thankful that they are, as it's exposing arena-sized audiences to **THE HALO EFFECT**.

Don't let the Swedes' 'new band' status deceive you – they are actually a collection of ex-In Flames members rediscovering the melodeath sound they pioneered 30 years ago. *Gateways*, *Last Of Our Kind* and especially the closing *Shadowmind* get London limber, their twin-guitar leads and scream-along hooks invigorating a passionate if small congregation.

Unsurprisingly, Wembley Arena is absolutely rammed by the time the **AMON AMARTH** longship arrives. Death metal's favourite Vikings have long had an effects budget beyond the GDP of many countries, and tonight they've upped the pump to Iron Maiden–

bothering levels. Their drum riser is a helmet with TVs in the eyeholes, and two 15-foot-tall berserker effigies flank the five-piece when they rip into *Guardians Of Asgaard*. A skeletal Loki does his best Eddie impression during *Deceiver Of The Gods*, and *The Way Of Vikings* instigates an axe battle, before frontman Johan Hegg beats the shit out of an inflatable Jörmungandr for *Twilight Of The Thunder God*.

Even with such theatrics raining down, London counterattacks by threatening to steal the show. *Heidrun* is a deep cut only a month old, yet thousands of people are already roaring the chorus word-for-word. The burly folk chanting of *Raise Your Horns* is quickly picked up and carried all the way to the nosebleeds. The apex of the entire night, though, is *Put Your Back Into The Oar*. The anthem's mid-tempo heaving gets the moshpit down on their arses and rowing along. It's wild. The next time you see these Scandi brutes, they'll be headlining arenas on their own merit.

There's no way **MACHINE HEAD** can compete with that spectacle, so the Oakland agitators don't try. Instead, they inflate a basement thrash show to

titanic size, their flashiest asset being their light show. Spotlights blink between Robb Flynn and co-guitarist Wacław 'Vogg' Kiełtyka as they trade chugs during *Aesthetics Of Hate*, while strobes are perfectly wedded to every snare smack of *Imperium*.

Despite touring in support of August's *Of Kingdom And Crown*, only one new song makes the setlist, *Become The Firestorm* igniting the show with zero frills. There's no fandangled pyro or intro tape; the curtain drops, Robb howls "Go!" and all hell breaks loose. *I Am Hell* (*Sonata In C#*) plummets from symphonic grandeur to death metal, and begets the evening's biggest pit as a result. Then *Locust's* sliding chords incite wails that mimic every note, and *From This Day* sees bassist Jared MacEachern stomp around like he's being attacked by a swarm. Although *Darkness Within* heralds skyscrapers of fire, and *Halo* complements its high-flying harmonies with confetti, Machine Head's hour is more a testament to how natural charisma and great songwriting can rocket a band into the stratosphere.

MATT MILLS

BLOOD COMMAND
PHOXJAW

It's not even 8pm but Camden Assembly is rammed. Drones have rocked up early to hear **PHOXJAW** answer a question no one asked: what if Mastodon were fronted by Alex Turner? And, although the quartet's collision of sludge metal and Britpop melodies has flung them to Download and 2000trees festivals, they have never hit harder than in this attic. If the riff starting *You Don't Drink A Unicorn's Blood* is the world's hardest uppercut, then *Infinite Badness* is the strongest morphine hit, its chorus soothing London until all are grinning from ear to ear. Equally brutish yet innovative are **BLOOD COMMAND**. The Norwegians have long contorted pop punk into a seething hardcore fury and new singer Nikki Brumen only makes them twist further. She screams, sings, dances and stagedives with such vigour that the crowd can only reciprocate the energy. The frontwoman is also the emotional life of the party. Within 15 minutes she's shedding tears of joy, and her story of how joining the band lifted her from the throes of a break-up and losing both parents illuminates why. Amid a flurry of gang vocals and jagged chords, triumph has never sounded so pissed off.

SOUL GLO MIDDLEMAN

Brixton's Windmill isn't the most imposing venue, but the small pub tucked at the end of a residential estate is the perfect setting for an off-piste hardcore show. Openers **MIDDLEMAN** are fresh-faced and look barely out of school, and while their miserabilist punk is stripped down to its bare bones and they have a fill-in drummer who's taken the gig on a few hours' notice, their enthusiasm carries them through a short but impactful set. **SOUL GLO**'s scathing hardcore channels anger at structural racism and their experiences of being mixed race in America, and the crowd goes wild for them, even managing the odd crowdsurfer in the pub's confines. From squalls of screeching feedback to indecipherable howls and panicked drumming, their furious attack has it all, although some of the feedback sounds less than intentional and mars an otherwise faultless set. Material from this year's excellent *Diaspora Problems* album sounds even more desperate, especially in the sweaty press of bodies of their first ever UK show. This sold-out, intimate gig might be the warm-up for a tour of larger venues, but there's no sense of a band giving anything but their all.



METALHAMMER.COM **97**

Cancer Bats: Liam Cormier has a right ol' shindig

CANCER BATS

GRAPHIC NATURE

THE FLEECE, BRISTOL

Canada's hardcore punk destroyers return to raze the West Country

THE FIRST NIGHT of this extensive club tour has already hit a stumbling block. Due to illness, Yorkshire doom-punk mob Witch Fever have not made it to Bristol, leaving Kent's **GRAPHIC NATURE** as the only support. Recently signed to Rude Records, armed with a new EP and fresh from supporting Vended in London, they bring a boatload of nu metal-tinged metallic hardcore and sparkle with potential. At moments they sound as if Code Orange played with more straightforward time signatures; at others they evoke the groove-laden strains of Malevolence. The electronic backings are reminiscent of early Slipknot and the rhythm section's bounce and swagger is straight out of Korn's bag of tricks. Add to that the stage presence of frontman Harvey Freeman and an initially ambivalent audience warms to them considerably.

No need for such indifference with **CANCER BATS**, though. One of the most fearsome live acts on the planet, they're no strangers to the Fleece, and as *Psychic Jailbreak* kicks in the floor moves as one, with Liam Cormier the manic conductor of a growing sea of chaos. Still without

a permanent guitarist following Scott Middleton's departure, Fever 333's Stephen Harrison is playing with them on the run, but in truth nobody really cares who's deputising providing the songs still have the same righteous energy they need. Judging by the reaction to *Hail Destroyer*, *Bricks And Mortar* and a thunderous *Harem Of Scorpions*, that energy is there in spades. Circle-pits take up half the floor space as the atmosphere from both band and audience merges into one tightly concentrated ball of energy.

Canadian singer-songwriter Brooklyn Doran – who is on merch duties – joins in for *Hammering On* and latest single *Friday Night* segues into the customary bulldoze through the cover of *Sabotage*, which threatens to shake the Fleece's support pillars enough to bring the roof down. "Have we known each other long enough that we can call you the 'Brizzle Beauties?'" asks Liam. "You're right gurt lush, Brizzle Beauties!" Local terminology on point, venue successfully razed to the ground again – another mission accomplished.

ELLIOT LEAVER

BATTLE BEAST

FUTURE PALACE

ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON

In the wake of a new monarch, it feels apt that a band called **FUTURE PALACE** are playing tonight. Their songs – like *In This Moment* with glimpses of *Monuments* – might take some finessing, but Maria Lessing's stage presence is powerful. **BATTLE BEAST**'s ascent seems to be unstoppable, and the Finns' striking dominance is felt throughout a set that focuses on their new album, *Circus Of Doom*. The colossal title track opens the show amidst a blast of pyro, knocking it out of the park. Later, *Master Of Illusion*'s bombastic maximalism and pumping 80s track *Russian Roulette* further emphasise the strength of the new material. There's no complacency on tonight's setlist, only triumph, as Noora Louhimo lets her voice soar on *Straight To The Heart* and the folk-meets-Abba *No More Hollywood Endings*. Between anthems there's space for wisecracks too, as keytar-master Janne Björkroth whips out his pimped-up disco drum. The crowd love it, just like they love an impromptu singalong to *A Whole New World* from *Aladdin*. Closing with a double whammy of *King For A Day* and *Beyond The Burning Skies*, the band take a bow amid more pyro, ready to play much bigger stages when they return.

HOLLY WRIGHT

CRIPPLED BLACK PHOENIX

MØL

THE FLEECE, BRISTOL

A matter of weeks after their scintillating set at Arc tangent, **MØL**'s return to the southwest feels like a victory parade. When not on one of his jaunts through the crowd, vocalist Kim Song Sternkopf is contorting himself into geometric configurations, living for every note of the likes of *Tvesind* and *Photophobic*. How can something rooted in black metal elicit a gleeful, cathartic release? **CRIPPLED BLACK PHOENIX** have their own focal point in multi-instrumentalist Georg Paco L. Fleischfresser, but the headliners exude a calmer and more demure authority than their Danish support. Pushing The Fleece's stage capacity to its limits, the eight-strong line-up are themselves under the strain of recreating songs from fabulous recent efforts *Banefyre* and *Ellengæst*, as well as from their esteemed canon of progressive nourishment. Lynchpin Justin Greaves strikes a humble figure stage right, leaving Joel Segerstedt and Belinda Kordic to take the reins, swapping vocals on the majestic *Lost* and haunting *Everything Is Beautiful But Us*. Last song *Burnt Reynolds* brings proceedings to a close with its Floyd-esque twang, in a celebration of two bands wrapping aged bones in fresh, comforting embraces.

ADAM BRENNAN

Dawn Ray'd have a unique cure for congestion

RESTART THE HEART

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Dawn Ray'd head two days of underground deliverance

FACED WITH CLOSURE during the pandemic, Camden's much-loved The Black Heart turned to crowd-funding for survival, resulting in the inaugural Restart The Heart. Fast forward a year and the bar/venue is in rude health, throwing a second edition packed full of the UK's best extreme metal and donating a portion of ticket sales to charity. They've even thrown in a surprise appearance from Sweden's **THE HALO EFFECT**, who turn up to pull pints and play a DJ set after opening for Machine Head and Amon Amarth at Wembley.

Saturday is dedicated to all things slow and heavy; a who's who of underground sludge and doom, it's half a day of riffs so dense you feel rather than hear them. Earlier in the day, **EVEREST QUEEN** bring self-dubbed "post-sludge metal" to bear that's every bit as towering as their moniker,

but when **SLABDRAGGER** and headliners **SLOMATIC**s appear, things get kicked up several notches. A cheery punter yells "Let's drag some slabs!" before the former, and the packed-out room soon bears witness to literally gut-churning heaviness, with a tone thicker than molasses. An exercise in being slowly encased in a concrete tomb, Slabdragger bring an ungodly amount of tonal heft that threatens to flatten all in its path. Somatics have some serious sonic heft to them as well, but they don't quite match the former's monolithic intensity and have to contend with the presence of The Halo Effect downstairs, which does them no favours.

Spooky special guests **ZETRA** open Sunday with their synth-driven space rock before The Black Heart is subjected to an unholy barrage of black metal. **HIDDEN MOTHERS**

make an extremely convincing bid for band of the day with their blend of blackened screamo and post-metal, and the pained crescendo on their final song is truly arresting. **CALLIGRAM** are like desperate, desolate ravings into the abyss, somewhere far past the brink of madness. Their sheer intensity is unmatched, vocalist Matteo Rizzardo spending as much time writhing on the floor as he does shrieking into the front rows' faces. Finally, Liverpool's **DAWN RAY'D** bring their blackened, violin-infused screeds against the right-wing and oppression to bear, a howl of 'It's time for tales of new resistance!' heralding their arrival. Unfortunately, the lack of bass hurts their sound, leaving it sounding thin and anaemic despite the full-throated conviction with which their songs are delivered.

WILL MARSHALL



Hidden Mothers prove contagious



Calligram gaze into the abyss, and the abyss moshes also

Bridear bring a trove of gifts to the home of metal



BRIDEAR

THE CASTLE AND FALCON, BIRMINGHAM

Japan's metal bravehearts keep their kaleidoscope spinning

ALMOST A YEAR since the Into The Dark Forever tour hit this very Birmingham venue, the sky's been the limit for Japan's Bridear. When fourth full-length *Aegis Of Athena* exploded like a technicolour blitzkrieg earlier this year, it showcased J-metal unlike many acts before them, with a sonic grandeur lovingly offset by an endearing charm and lyrical sincerity. And there's a certain, but nonetheless welcome feeling of déjà vu tonight, as the punters are plunged into darkness and a markedly revered silence for these high-energy mavens. Until an unidentified sneeze from the stage ensues and a comedic shout of "Bless you!" breaks it, that is.

Once again, the band's collective shyness belies the audio-visual spectacle that follows suit, as the five-piece conjure some storytelling magic via the spoken-word intro of *Side Of A Bullet*, before quickly dialling up the prog and balancing shreds with symphonic bombast and Kimi's sweetly soaring singing. Backed up by an anthemic salvo of *Daybreak* and *The Moment*, it's a *Bloody Bride*-era bonanza that sends the crowd into fist-pumping ecstasy. Breaking out the six-string tandem and burning up their fretboards,

beaming shredders Ayumi and Moe confidently take centre stage, as earworm choruses joyfully explode in a cloud of power metal glory, while the mid-song synchronised windmilling is wonderfully OTT. Insatiable pop hooks, blistering leads and blues-soaked riffery drench a mouth-watering rendition of *Ray Of Chaos*, and it's here where that ambitious balance of what inspires this young band – namely the NWOBHM tastefully laced with modern metal characteristics – can be heard.

The monolithic *Brave New World Revisited* is undeniably dizzying in its versatility and technical wizardry, but the intensity of *everything* during this set – from displays of six-string magnificence to Helloween-esque pomp to doom-laden interludes – is consistently startling. For despite the elaborate live shenanigans, Bridear's melodic intelligence is never compromised as a result. There's just enough time for the quintet to unleash closer *Bloody Bride*'s multifaceted, metalcore-meets-EDM wackiness before going out on a wild-eyed, tubthumping high courtesy of sugary-yet-speedy confection *Again*. Welcome to the golden age of Japanese metal.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

NEKROMANTHEON ONA SNOP/HUMAN LEATHER

WINDMILL, LONDON

Kicking off the final stretch of the Smash It Out all-dayer, **HUMAN LEATHER** are determined to make everyone chuck up the early evening's free barbecue. Doling out a series of gut-punches, there's something very John Peel session about the ungainly, trying-to-upright-yourself grooves, and their noise-rock is a riot of frustration, like it's trying to punch its way out of a balloon. Part grind, part hardcore punk, and jacked up on whimsy, **ONA SNOP** have bypassed the incendiary zeal of either scene but are happy to just start a racket and a wild moshpit anyway. George Wright's frenzied vocals ride a palpitating wave of guitars, giving off the impression of a scrapheap caught in a tornado. It all seems a bit small-fry, though, compared to headliners as commanding as **NEKROMANTHEON**. Generals compared to the conscripts that make up most of today's current thrash scene, even on a reduced set-up the Norwegians are tapped into the otherworldly, apocalyptic sources that still lie at metal's old-school heart. Tonight, it feels like they're erupting, the dual, reverbed vocals akin to a marauding demon army that turns a small corner of Brixton into an ecstatic uprising.

JONATHAN SELZER

OBSCURA PERSEFONE

EXCHANGE, BRISTOL

Playing in a city six times the population of their own country, Andorra's **PERSEFONE** are a charming, humble bunch, and bloody brilliant at progressive death metal. Backed by a plethora of strobes, the likes of *Stillness Is Timeless* and *Mind As Universe* receive a great reception from a packed room, but they could benefit from having their guitars higher in the mix, as the drums overpower at points. **OBSCURA** need more vocals; Steffen Kummerer's powerful tones are often lost among the shred of his and Christian Münzner's axes. However, their sheer tightness, coupled with an abundant love from the punters, means their technical death metal goes down a storm, especially a *Devoured Usurper* that sees a large amount of spinning hair and bodies as the pit opens properly for the first time. With 24 hours' notice, Malignancy bassist Alex Weber has flown from the States to fill in for a poorly Jeroen Thesseling and slots in like he's a founding member, which makes the band's impact even more impressive. As *Incarnate* delivers one final blow, there's not one person leaving without a massive grin.

ELLIOT LEAVER

CASSYETTE

KID BOOKIE

ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON

Nu gen's prime provocateur incites a riot of joy

TONIGHT IS A night for misfits. It's one of the more diverse crowds you'll see; metalheads in battle jackets stand alongside girls whose hair and eyeliner are both reaching to the heavens, thrusting their middle fingers up and crying out "Fuck it, fuck 'em!" at the command of Tyronne Hill, aka **KID BOOKIE**. Continuing the set in this defiant vein, Bookie is a compelling presence on the stage from start to finish – and he certainly knows what it's like to feel like a misfit, coming up against anti-blackness in the metal scene daily. His uniquely London take on nu metal infused with elements of grime and trap oscillates between heavy riffing, furious rapping as fast as machine-gun fire and swathes of grunge-inspired melodies, and it's not hard to get this crowd moshing and even into a mini wall of death. The high-octane set draws from recent EP *Mass Hysteria* and even includes a cover of Radiohead's *Creep*, dedicated to "you beautiful weirdos", which is a rather sweet addition.

Speaking of weirdos – in the nicest possible way – it's time for the Essex-born **CASSYETTE**, as she makes a homecoming of sorts on the stage of the sold-out Academy. If Courtney Love and Keith Flint had had a baby, and that baby had been adopted and raised by Bimini Bon Boulash, they might turn out a bit like Cassy Brooking. She's an absolute force, prowling the stage as she spits and screams her way through the razor-sharp set, but besides the indignant punk bravado of a young and talented artist, she's also utterly elated and radiates warmth towards her adoring fans. With songs like *Dear Goth* and its addictively camp introduction ("Dear Goth, it's been 666 days since my last confession..."), the incredibly catchy refrain of *Sad Girl Summer* and a plethora of other genre-smashing songs making up her set, you'd forgive Cassy for being a bit cocky, but she just seems thrilled to be here.

The atmosphere is one of euphoria, inclusion and catharsis, as she tells the audience to "Scream so loud all your exes can hear you!" before the heartfelt *Mayhem*. It feels like a criminally short set, but by the time Cassy and her band come back onstage to play *Dear Goth* again, not once but twice, the whole room is in the palm of her hand, letting out some feelings as they scream the lyric 'I feel like a fucking loser!' on her cue. With more material under her belt, she'll be unstoppable.

CATHERINE MORRIS



Cassette puts a hex on all your exes





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You formed Petbrick with Wayne Adams from noise-rock duo Big Lad. Were you familiar with the noise rock scene beforehand?

"The stuff I like in noise music is more the Japanese side of things, like Merzbow. Once I moved to London, I started to see more of the psychedelic heavy stuff that was happening here – Big Lad, [promoter] Baba Yaga's Hut and then all the little festivals like Raw Power and Supernormal. I first saw Big Lad in Camden opening for really good friends of ours and I was blown away, especially the stuff that Wayne was doing with electronics. I went to Wayne's studio, and we had some coffee and started talking about how it would be cool to make some jams together, and that eventually became Petbrick."

When did it become obvious that it was something that you were going to share with the rest of the world?

"There's this other band from New York called Uniform, and I remember they asked me to do something to open their set. So I went to Wayne and said, 'Do you want to try to do this thing that we've been writing live?' That was pretty much the transition, and we had a blast playing together live, so that's when we started to write a few more songs. It was very organic: two people who love music going to the studio and writing stuff without any master plan behind it."

You'll always be associated with metal because of your work with Sepultura, but you collaborate with lots of different artists, such as Wayne, Soulwax, Ladytron etc. Is it important for you to keep your oar in different styles to keep things fresh?

"Yeah, I mean that comes from early ideas in Sepultura where we were covering bands like New Model Army

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FIVE MINUTES WITH

IGGOR CAVALERA

PETBRICK, CAVALERA CONSPIRACY

Legendary ex-Sepultura drummer talks roots, *Roots* and reinventing himself as an industrial noise maverick

WORDS: REMFRY DEDMAN



or even Bob Marley. We always tried to be a bit more open-minded when writing and collaborating with other people. Stuff like Soulwax or Ladytron, it all stems from that state of mind of wanting to exchange ideas."

And if it weren't for that ethos, we wouldn't have *Roots*, an undisputed classic of the genre...

"Yeah, I think you're right. *Roots* was the culmination of a lot of those things that we're talking about – being open-minded, trying to experiment with different styles, and pushing the boundaries of things within a scene that is sometimes not progressive. When you think about metal it can sometimes be too conservative, and *Roots* came at a time where we were trying to push those limits while respecting what we were experimenting with.

For us it was a bit boring having to keep doing the same record over and over."

People might be surprised with your newfound association with a genre as niche as avant-garde noise rock.

"It's a scene within a scene, something that is very unique and niche in a way. It reminds me of the beginning of Sepultura, where it wasn't about the quantity of people but the people who were there knew exactly why they were there. It was not like a fashion thing, it was not just hype."

You started drumming at the age of seven. What was it that drew you to hitting the skins?

"I was going to football games with my brother and my dad, who was a huge football fanatic. He would go every week to watch our team, Palmeiras, in São Paulo. In Brazil, you're allowed to bring drums into the stadium, and during the game, they'd play those beats and rhythms to push the team. And that was my first experience with drums, when I was around five or six, watching those guys in the stadium."

Are there any drummers or bands that you're really excited about at the moment?

"There's a lot of amazing music at the moment, man. Like, from heavy stuff to experimental. One of my favourite drummers at the moment that I'm really inspired by is Mariano from Deafkids. I don't know if you've seen them live, but that guy's a beast, he's like an African Ginger Baker in a way. The way he plays is so unorthodox." **H**

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